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DOESN'T THINK SO!

FROM TARZAN TO THE LONE RANGER WITH GOLDEN AGE GREAT--
**GAYLORD DUBOIS**

A GAB WITH ARTIST--
**JERRY GRANDENETTI**
FROM THE SPIRIT TO THE SPECTRE!

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S COMICS INTERVIEW

#17

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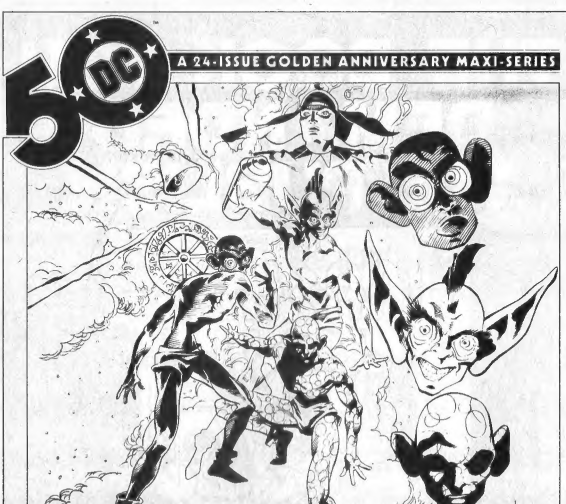


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# UP FRONT

Word is out.

In drawing rooms all across the country, in editorial offices near and far, the news is being greeted with shock and disbelief.

What started as a whisper has broken out in a roar, and all across comicdom people are demanding to know: Is it a trick? Surely, such a thing is too preposterous, too outlandish to be true.

But I am here to tell you — it's not a rumor, not an imaginary story.

The impossible has become reality.

I am living proof that dreams — no matter how far beyond any mortal's grasp, no matter how seemingly unattainable — can come true.

I am proud to stand as a symbol, a sort of living legend — proof positive that the ultimate in human striving can be achieved by one individual.

In short, after all these years, I have succeeded in excavating through piles — nay! mountains — of paper. . .ALL THE WAY DOWN TO MY ACTUAL DESK TOP!

Gleaming, revealed at last to the light, it is a truly wondrous sight to behold. I'd like to tell you how much this means to me, but I'm just too choked up with emotion to go on.

Dave

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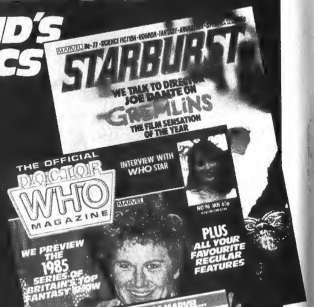
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In issue #7, a back-up series called "Missing Beings" begins, written by Henry Vogel and drawn by Bill Neville It's off to a very promising start and Bill's art is excellent, making *Southern Knights* even more worthwhile. Check it out.

--Don Thompson
THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE
October 26, 1984

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# "The TARZAN comics never suffered the ridiculous restrictions Dell's other comics did."

# GAYLORD DUBOIS

If you are an Edgar Rice Burroughs fan or a Tarzan buff, you may regard the mention of Gaylord DuBois' name with quite a bit of pleasure — for DuBois wrote the TARZAN comic for Dell and Gold Key virtually uninterrupted from 1949 through 1971, when the character passed into the hands of DC. His Tarzan comics have been praised highly by the likes of Camille Cazedessus, Jr. one of the leading Tarzan fan-critics of all time and, indirectly, by Edgar Rice Burroughs himself, who once wanted to know why the TARZAN comic strip wasn't doing as well as the TARZAN comic book, which sold out its run issue after issue, year after year.

But Gaylord has done much more than write TARZAN in his long-running career. He wrote a large number of Big Little Books in the Thirties and Forties for Western, as well as the first of the LONE RANGER novels. He scripted KING OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED, RED RYDER and several other strips, wrote a number of books, such as THE LONG RIDER and THE PONY EXPRESS, and even authored a cookbook and a volume of love poems. For Dell/Gold Key he scripted the comics versions of BAT MASTERSON, BONANZA, GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, LASSIE, SILVER (the Lone Ranger's horse — yes, it had a comic book, too), and many others.

But his greatest comics achievement was the 20-year-plus work on the TARZAN comic. With original artist Jesse Marsh, Gaylord created a "Jungle World" that synthesized elements from both ERB and the popular Tarzan movies, and continued the Ape Man's adventures in a highly successful comic that weathered the turbulence of the Fifties without criticism. Later, in 1965, Russ Manning took over the art and the two of them began the longest-running — and perhaps the best — series of Burroughs adaptations in comic books, adapting twenty-one of the twenty-five Tarzan novels.

Here, then, is a talk with Tarzan's comics godfather...

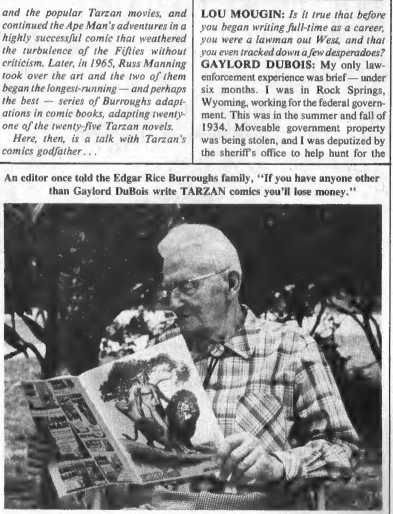
## VITAL STATISTICS

**Name:** Gaylord DuBois
**Occupation:** Writer
**Birthdate:** 24 August 1899 — Winthrop, MA
**Residence:** Orange City, Florida
**Credits:** TARZAN, TUROK, RED RYDER, KING OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED, SPACE FAMILY ROBINSON, etc.; a host of Big Little Books and novels (including THE LONE RANGER and a volume of poems, THE SHINING PATH: HIGHLIGHTS OF A CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE).

**LOU MOUGIN:** *Is it true that before you began writing full-time as a career, you were a lawman out West, and that you even tracked down a few desperadoes?*

**GAYLORD DUBOIS:** My only lawenforcement experience was brief — under six months. I was in Rock Springs, Wyoming, working for the federal government. This was in the summer and fall of 1934. Moveable government property was being stolen, and I was deputized by the sheriff's office to help hunt for the

**An editor once told the Edgar Rice Burroughs family, "If you have anyone other than Gaylord DuBois write TARZAN comics you'll lose money."**



# "Basically, the anti-comics crusaders were on the right

An endpaper illustration from the first LONE RANGER novel, written by Gaylord DuBois (later credited to Fran Stryker).

thieves. I rode with another deputy over the open cattle range on horseback, looking for the thieves and the missing property. Once I was sent out alone to bring in a man who was described to me as "dangerous." Fortunately, he submitted quietly to arrest. I brought him in, handcuffed, in a pickup truck I was using. The whole experience was insignificant except that it gave me a background for writing western stories. Most of the Big Little Books and adventure stories I wrote in the Thirties, such as THE LONE RANGER, were westerns.

**LOU:** *How did you come to write THE LONE RANGER?*

**GAYLORD:** In 1936 I was given a copy of the LONE RANGER radio script with the following instructions: "Write a 60,000 word novel based on this script, and if we accept it, you will have more assignments." I thought the script was pretty corny, and not very good material to base a novel on, but I managed to use a little of it as the base for a plot. The novel — which was titled THE LONE RANGER — came out under my name as the author on the dust jacket and cover. But my name was removed from the third and subsequent editions or printings.

**LOU:** *Are you bitter about that?*

**GAYLORD:** No, I've never had any complaints about that, because I sold all the rights to the novel to Whitman, the publisher. I guess they thought it was less confusing for the reader to think that the entire series was written by **Fran Stryker.** Back in those days I did quite a bit of ghost-writing for well-known adventure authors.

**LOU:** *Would you care to name them?*

**GAYLORD:** No. They shall remain nameless.

**LOU:** *When did you start writing comics?*

**GAYLORD:** In 1937 **Lloyd Smith**, who was an editor for Whitman, assigned me my first comics. Back then the whole idea of a comic magazine was experimental. Some of them had twelve panels on a page. Following **Smith's** instructions, I invented original western plots, and wrote them out, twelve panels to a page. For each twelve-panel page I wrote, I was paid fifty cents. In 1939 I worked as a script writer on KING OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED, when **Jim Gary** was doing the art work, and for **Fred Harmon**, when he was doing his own artwork on RED RYDER. **Oskar Lebeck** was on Whitman's editorial staff, and through him I started writing comic-book scripts full time. At one point my workload got so heavy I had to dictate scripts to my wife while she typed them. Late in the day, we would receive rush orders over the phone from Whitman, and one night I worked with my wife until four in the morning, and then rolled onto the bed fully-clothed while Mary went out to see that the manuscript was delivered to Whitman that very morning!

**LOU:** *Your most famous work, I'm sure, was the long tour of duty — twenty years or so, if I calculate correctly — on the Dell/Gold Key TARZAN series, including KORAK. When did you begin writing it?*

**GAYLORD:** Late 1946, I think. Maybe '47. I wasn't the first writer on the series, and I wasn't the only one, but I wrote most of them — with the help of the editors.

**LOU:** *How did the editors help?*

**GAYLORD:** From time to time I'd get instructions: "Use new backgrounds!" or "Make the stories less fantastic!" or "Bring back La, the High Priestess of Opar — the readers insist!" Sometimes I rewrote the script, under the editor's direction, and sometimes the editors let the script go through unchanged. Occasionally I would be told, for example, that all three of the main characters — Tarzan, Jane or Korak — had to be

© 1936 THE LONE RANGER, Inc.

# track — one that could lead to national survival."

featured in a certain story, and of course there were always clear instructions on editorial policy — nothing sexy, nothing that could honestly be called "horror," and so on. Strictly speaking, the writing of the script was not a one-man job, a lot of the time.

**LOU:** *Were you familiar with the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs before you started writing TARZAN?*

**GAYLORD:** Oh, yes. I started reading ERB in the 1920s, and devoured his JOHN CARTER OF MARS stories as well as the TARZAN series. When I began scripting the TARZAN comics, I read every bit of ERB marterial I could get hold of. If it had been left up to me, I would have faithfully adhered to ERB in all my scripts — but if I'd done that, I'd have been fired! Yet I did use names, places and characters mentioned in the novels, while taking care not to plagiarize any of the stories. I used **Burroughs'** Ape-English glossary, as closely as possible, sometimes having to invent new Ape words in certain situations.

**LOU:** *What about aspects of the Tarzan mythos created by the movies?*

**GAYLORD:** I saw only a few of the movies, and they had almost nothing I could use for the comics.

**LOU:** *Did you ever have any personal contact with Burroughs himself, or get any feedback from him on the comics?*

**GAYLORD:** I didn't have any personal contact with ERB or his family, but I did get indirect feedback from them, through **Chase Craig**, my editor. I understand they told Chase that Western was making so much money from Tarzan that the Burroughs Corporation had decided to end Western's option on the character, and that they would be putting out original Tarzan comics themselves, using their own writers. Chase warned them, "If you have any other writer than **Gaylord DuBois**, you will lose money." The **Burroughs** folks ignored his advice and published some dismally poor stuff.

**LOU:** *Once you named two characters "Hal Hogarth" and "Burne Foster"! Did the TARZAN newspaper strip influence your work any?*

**GAYLORD:** No, the strip had little or no effect on what I was doing. The novels were the biggest influence. It was fun to originate plots and be able to use so many of the **Burroughs** characters — not just Tarzan, but La, D'Arnot, and the others — in plots of my own.

**LOU:** *You are, I'm told, a lay minister in the Church of the Nazarene. Since clergymen are kind of a rarity in comics, I*

From Gaylord's adaptation of ERB's TARZAN AND THE GOLDEN LION, in Gold Key's TARZAN #172. Art by Russ Manning.

SUDDENLY LEOPARD LEAPS INTO THE ROOM WITH RAISED SPEAR. THE POWERFUL WHITE GIANT OF THE JUNGLE, SO QUICK IS HE THAT NO SLEEN WEAPON OF ENTRY HIS SPEAR IS LAUNCHED.
KREEGAH! TARZAN KILLS!!
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# "I prayed for guidance in every comic I wrote."

*wondered if this affected your comics in any appreciable way.*

**GAYLORD:** For thirty years my wife, Mary, and I were members of the Church of the Nazarene, and I held a district minister's license for several years, although I chose never to be ordained. But, yes, it has affected my comics writing. As a Bible-believing Christian, I have prayed for guidance in every book and every comic that I have written. My job as a writer of books and comics came as a direct answer to prayer.

**LOU:** *Have you seen any of the DC or Marvel Tarzan comics?*

**GAYLORD:** I've seen only one or two of the TARZAN comics published since the Burroughs Corporation cancelled Western's option. I thought they were horrible. They did violence not only to ERB but to good taste.

**LOU:** *Well, I've observed that, compared to the Marvel and DC adaptations of Tarzan, the Dell and Gold Key TARZANs were almost devoid of violence. Was there a rule against putting too much violence in the strip?*

**GAYLORD:** Well, at the time, parents were panicked by the campaigners against "violence" in comic books, and in turn scared the publishers until they all but emasculated their adventure stories. Once I had a script rejected because there was supposed to be a long shot of two or three wild peccaries hung up as trophies and meat. Still, the TARZAN comics never suffered the utterly ridiculous restrictions that most of Dell's comic books did.

**LOU:** *Yet as a religious person, couldn't you feel a certain sympathy with the anti-comics crusaders?*

**GAYLORD:** Basically, they were on the right track — one that could lead to national survival. Today the anti-God, anti-moral, anti-life pressures have brought our world to a suicidal crisis. As Hamlet put it, "To be or not to be, that is the question."

**LOU:** *The company that began as Dell, evolved into Gold Key and finally became Whitman fell from the primary comics company of the Thirties into a barely visible outfit, almost impossible to find on the stands, and is now fading away. Do you have any idea why this occurred?*

**GAYLORD:** I'm not really knowledgeable in the matter of intra-corporation maneuverings and vicissitudes. I only paid occasional visits to the company's office and mainly worked through the mail or via long-distance telephone calls with the editors at Western. In the mid-Seventies, the editors informed me that they were dropping all adventure-type comics — my *forte* — and could assign me work in only three fields of writing – sex, horror, and the occult. Well, as a practicing Christian, I could not touch such rot, and I told the editors so. I suspect that the moral decline of their editorial policies contributed to the company's decline in the market.

**LOU:** *Is there anything you'd like to pass on to the new generation of comics writers?*

**GAYLORD:** I would say that the American public, by and large, is homesick for old-time moral and emotional values, as well as the old-time comic-book personalities. Comics for children — such as BUGS BUNNY, TOM AND JERRY, GENE AUTRY or LOST IN SPACE — could stage a great comeback. Publications that are destructive of the public's mental and moral health are ultimately self-destructive.

**LOU:** *Are there any TARZAN stories in particular you'd like to be remembered for?*

**GAYLORD:** All of them.

PLUCKY LITTLE FELLOW!
HIS MOTHER MUST HAVE CHARGED THE HUNTER TO DEFEND HIM! THE MAN IS DEAD, TOO!
PFFT!!
'T WAS THUS THAT TARZAN FOUND THE YOUNG LION CUB... TARZAN AND JANE, HIS WIFE, AND KORAK, THEIR SON, RETURNING FROM THE MYSTERIOUS LAND OF PAL-UL-DON...

**The swinging Greystoke family, depicted by Russ Manning in TARZAN #172. Words by Gaylord DuBois.**

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# "Screw the money! I'm telling stories for

**people who can think for themselves!''**

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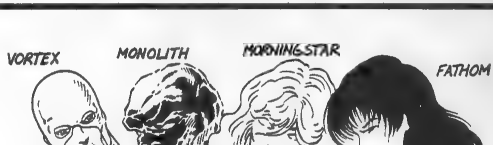


# BILL WILLINGHAM

*The Indiana Jones of comics — archaeologist and world trouble-shooter, Bill Willingham — holds the spotlight at center stage as he attempts death-defying feats of verbal derring-do in this outspoken interview.*

*After an astonishing opening act in which he unleashed THE ELEMENTALS to conquer the comics world, the creator provocateur now takes unwavering aim right here in these pages at such taboo targets as religion, intolerance, and ''big tits in comics,'' with inker Rich Rankin as a special guest star, dapper Dan Smeddy in the role of inquisitor, and artist Matt Wagner in a cameo as the Beaver.*

**DAN SMEDDY:** *I'm here in the Bain Sidhe Studio (that's pronounced ''Banshee'') to interview Bill Willingham, creator of THE EMEMENTALS, and Rich Rankin, inker of the ELEMENTALS, which were also created by Bill Willingham.*

**BILL WILLINGHAM:** Let's have some more mentions of **Bill Willingham**!

**DAN:** *All right. Bill Willingham, seeker of the depraved — also letterer of THE ELEMENTALS —*

**BILL:** Until we can find someone else to do the job.

**DAN:** *Bill is coloring the cover for COMICS INTERVIEW right now, and obviously that's more important than doing the interview, so I'll ask all the questions of Rich, and Rich will answer for Bill. So tell me, Bill — Rich, talking as Bill — how did you get in comics?*

**RICH RANKIN:** Well, it all started —

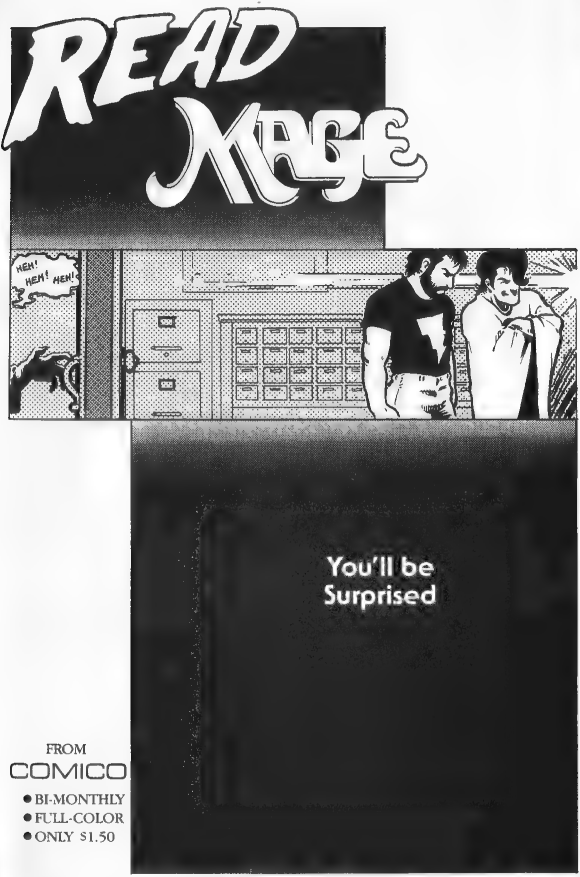
**BILL:** Wait! Think what this is all going to sound like when they transcribe the tape — it'll be hopelessly confusing! Let's just get some voices down, so they can tell who's who.

**DAN:** *All right, everybody — speak into the mike.*

**BILL:** All right, this is going to be Rich.

**DAN:** *All right, this is going to be Rich*

**RICH:** No, this is **Rich Rankin**. How are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# "They all thought I'd suddenly gone gay!"

you, DAK? Hello, testing one two three.
**MATT WAGNER** *(chining in from background):* Rich, this is Bill, and Bill, Rich...
**RICH:** That was **Matt Wagner**. He has nothing to do with this interview, but you'll hear his comments from time to time in the background.
**MATT:** No, you probably won't.
**RICH:** No, you probably won't. Like that one there
**DAN:** *Yes, through the magic of audio recording, our voices sound different. Now we'll start with the questions. All right. Bill, how did you get into comics?*
**BILL:** Wait!
**DAN:** *What do you mean, wait? You ought to know the answer by now, Bill — after all, you're in comics. Maybe we should ease into it — what did you do before you got into the comics industry?*
**BILL:** Professionally, while in college, I did a lot of ads and such for local ad agencies, in Oregon. Pretty much lied my way into those jobs. Copied things out of ad magazines and went and showed the agencies, and they would give me a job. One ad agency mentioned that they only did fashion advertisements, and they asked to see my fashion ad portfolio — which I assured them that I had, of course... I just hadn't brought it. I went home that night and created a fashion ad portfolio after stealing copies of VOGUE and COSMOPOLITAN and all that sort of stuff from female dorm members — they all thought I'd all of a sudden gone gay!
**DAN:** *Well, did you?*
**BILL:** No, no, just took all their fashion magazines, while they all went — wink, grin, nudge — something we didn't know about Bill. Did that during college. Did the publicity for a local band, too, and after college for a while I did the do-your-sketch-for-ten-dollars schtick in San Francisco. That was fun. I worked at TSR Hobbies for a year as one of their staff artists, and then for another year, on a freelance basis, after that TSR Hobbies are the makers of DUN-

Rich Rankin

GEONS AND DRAGONS and other role-playing and adventure games. During that time, I did all those DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS adventure strips that were in the back of Marvel comics and EPIC Magazine. Those were mine. From there, I made the transition to comics.
**DAN:** *Okay. How about you, Rich?*
**RICH:** Basically, I was interested in syndicated cartoon strips. Newspaper stuff — you know, like PEANUTS and those kinds of funny strips. After drawing up a few ideas and taking them up to New York when I was 17 or 18, I learned that if you work for a syndicate, you have to be able to do everything — so they were mainly interested in people on their own staff to assign a strip. You hardly ever walk in and get your own strip. That kind of discouraged me for a while, and I ended up getting sidetracked for a number of years in rock music. Played in numerous bands, one of which put out two albums that never really got much national exposure, but we were fairly satisfied with them. One was done by a major producer who's also produced **Liza Minnelli**, which didn't mean he knew anything about rock music.
**DAN:** *What was the name of the band?*
**RICH:** Majik. The Majik Band.
**DAN:** *Wow.*
**MATT:** Heavy.
**RICH:** Matt does MAGE, so magic has special significance for him. Anyway, I was in that band for about ten years and, in the meantime — since it's not really a lucrative profession, unless you have a hit record — I was doing other jobs. I was managing a comic-book store for a while, which is where I really started getting interested on a professional basis. I was still drawing as a hobby, hanging my drawings up on the store wall for people to see and make comments on. One in particular was **Neil Rhodes**, an up-and-coming penciller, who was interested in my inking, so we got together to do a story. It was my first experience inking somebody else's work. Previously, I had just done my own pencils. After that we called Comico, which happened to be nearby, and they ended up publishing the story. It came out in a minor publication, but it was an initial experience, and it was good in that sense. Being around Comico all the time, eventually I met everybody up there — **Matt Wagner**, **Bill Cucinotta**, the whole gang — and one day **Bill Willingham** came in. He was trying to sell the rights to THE ELEMENTALS to the highest bidder. Of course, the first thing I told him when I saw his artwork was that he did great signs, which he still does to this day.
**DAN:** *Signs?*
**RICH:** Yeah. But his *forte* had to be his women. He draws the nicest women in comics.

**Rich's inks over art by Matt Wagner for Fantasy Games, Unltd.**

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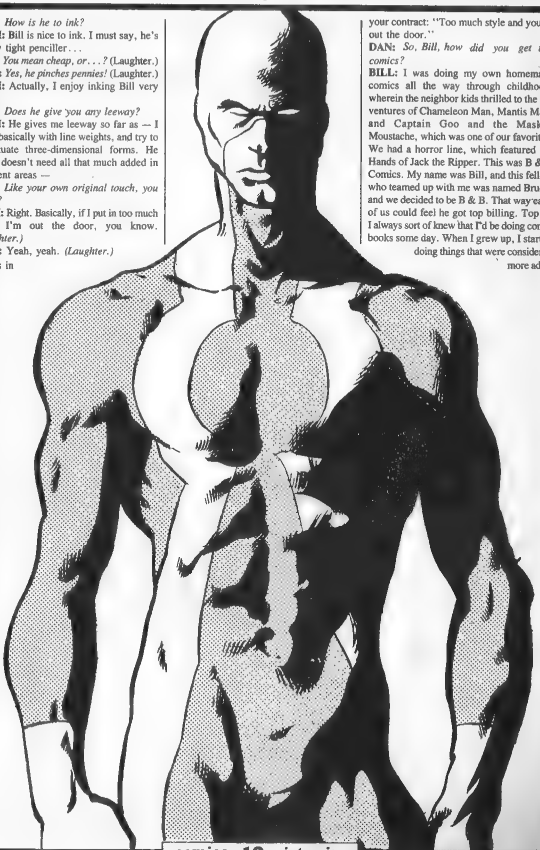
# "Too much style and you're out the door."

**DAN:** *How is he to ink?*
**RICH:** Bill is nice to ink. I must say, he's a very tight penciller . . .
**DAN:** *You mean cheap, or . . .?* (Laughter.)
**BILL:** *Yes, he pinches pennies!* (Laughter.)
**RICH:** Actually, I enjoy inking Bill very much.
**DAN:** *Does he give you any leeway?*
**RICH:** He gives me leeway so far as — I work basically with line weights, and try to accentuate three-dimensional forms. He really doesn't need all that much added in different areas —
**DAN:** *Like your own original touch, you mean?*
**RICH:** Right. Basically, if I put in too much style, I'm out the door, you know. *(Laughter.)*
**BILL:** Yeah, yeah. *(Laughter.)* That's in your contract: "Too much style and you're out the door."
**DAN:** *So, Bill, how did you get into comics?*
**BILL:** I was doing my own homemade comics all the way through childhood, wherein the neighbor kids thrilled to the adventures of Chameleon Man, Mantis Man, and Captain Goo and the Masked Moustache, which was one of our favorites. We had a horror line, which featured the Hands of Jack the Ripper. This was B & B Comics. My name was Bill, and this fellow who teamed up with me was named Bruce, and we decided to be B & B. That way each of us could feel he got top billing. Top B. I always sort of knew that I'd be doing comic books some day. When I grew up, I started doing things that were considered more adult



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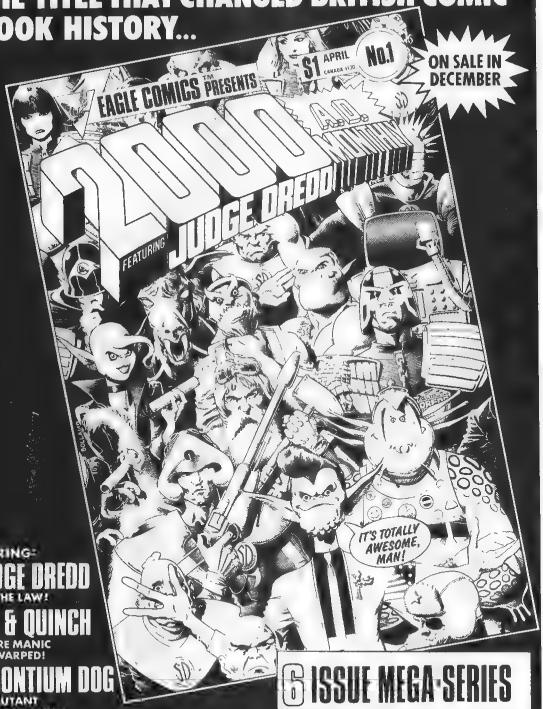


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# "I fought crime in the streets of Germany."

and mature, sort of, something a "real man" would do, that type of thing. So I got diverted a little. In college, I studied anthropology. I spent some time in Mexico, playing Tarzan in the jungle and studing natives on the spot. During that period, I did all kinds of strange jobs: Gas station attendant, store clerk, fry cook, truck driver — I was a truck driver, for a while. Eighteen wheeler. Big deal! We're talking big trucks! We're talking "Moving On" here!

**DAN:** *From the tribes of Peru —*

**BILL:** No, no. The Yucatan. Down amongst the Mayan Indians. In Yucatan they're Mayan.

**DAN:** *You don't expect me to believe that stuff, that you were in the Yucatan —*

**BILL:** Yeah, in the Yucatan, studying the Mayan indians, studying cultural anthropology. But I ran out of money, so I couldn't finish my college degree in anthropology. Fooled around cooking for a restaurant for a while. Then, because I was interested in police work — plus, I had this gigantic college debt to pay off, and I was broke, and I wanted to travel some more — I joined the Army, as a military policeman.

**RICH:** "Be all that you can be. . "

**BILL:** Quiet. But, seriously, I went to Germany as a military policeman, and I fought crime for three years in the streets. You dealt with your drug pushers, with your rapists, with your —

**DAN:** *Pimps?*

**BILL:** Well, no. Prostitution is *legal* in Germany, so we didn't deal with that. Just rape.

**DAN:** *So, it was almost like real police work —*

**BILL:** Almost. Almost like real police work. Except pimps — we never dealt with pimps.

**DAN:** *I think you've made that point. There are no pimps in Germany.*

**BILL:** Nary a pimp! When I got out of the Army, I decided police work was not for me. I was more of a kid playing policeman — which was fun, because everyone I met was doing exactly the same thing, out there playing Officer Belligerent on the streets of Germany. That's when I went to TSR. I'd already been accepted at TSR as an art jobber. At that point, I knew I was going to go into comics. That was what I wanted to do, and TSR was a place to mark time and get some artistic experience until I could get a good comics portfolio together.

A year later, I took a week off and went to New York. I got an interview with **John Romita**, who I had heard was the art director of Marvel at the time. Went up there and showed him my portfolio. But he was actually the art director of special projects — like Spider-Man tie-ins to merchandising promotions. Things like that. So he explained right off that he could tell me what's good and what's bad about my work, but he couldn't give me a job. If he liked it, he'd show it around. He looked at my stuff and had some complaints, but he saw some potential there, enough so that he xeroxed

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BILL WILLINGHAM

# "Unless it looks like Buscema's stuff,

some of the work and showed it around. It attracted the attention of someone working at Marvel, and this person — who will remain nameless — came in rather enthusiastically to where I was waiting for my art to come back, talked about how I had terrific artwork and said they'd be giving me some work, soon. It might take as much, this person said, as two or three weeks, before I got a job. Not really knowing my way around Marvel, I did not realize at the time that this person did not really have the authority to hand out jobs, wasn't really an editor in the position of being able to assign work. So, not knowing this I went back to TSR, quit my job, moved to New York, and sat and waited for the Marvel Comics jobs to come in.

A few weeks later, when I called this person again, I had to explain who I was. Marvel didn't remember me. And at that point they explained to me that this person was not in a position to assign any work. The most this person could do was show my stuff around to the real editors, which I could do, myself. So I did. I made appointments with a couple of editors. One was with **Al Milgrom**, who was an editor there at the time. Told me to show up at some particular time, which I did, and found that all kinds of people were before me, people who had just shown up, and I was to wait behind them. I schlepped around to some of the other editorial offices while I was waiting for my appointment with **Mr. Milgrom**. By the time he got through with the others, it was lunch time, and he was heading out to lunch, so he sent his assistant to look at my stuff out in the reception room. The assistant pretty much prefaced his viewing of my work with, "well, unless it looks a lot like **John Buscema's** stuff right now, you're not going to leave here with a job." At which point, he sat down to look at my work. It didn't look a lot like **John Buscema's** so, needless to say, I didn't get work.

After that, it was about a year before I made the attempt again to do comics. In the meantime, I did the DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS strips that appeared as ads in Marvel comics — I sort of circled around the periphery of comics for some time. After about a year of that, I finally got fed up and decided I was going to do comic art again — I was starving by this time, since all the money I had saved from TSR was gone. I decided I was going to get into comics somehow. By this time, a lot of the independents had started coming into existence. So I went to the Forbidden Planet in New York — a comics shop — and bought every kind of independent comic I could find, from anyone. And sat down and wrote out letters. This was the time when **John Carbonaro's** comics had just started in black-and-white, Noble Comics had just started with the Justice Machine — I think it was before First had actually announced that they were going to do anything. Pacific Comics had started. Americomics, I think, was going. Whatever the case, I sent out some stuff. **Mike Gustovich** of Noble Comics called me, like, two days later. He received it and called right away, said, "Come on out, work for us, we love you, we love your stuff — get on out here."

Within a month, I was moving to Grand Rapids, Michigan, to work for Noble Comics. To make a long story short, they

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# you're not going to leave with a job."

didn't have any money to really produce comics. This was an outfit run by **Mike Gustovich** and his wife. So, I spent a year sort of semi-starving, sort of pseudo-working for Noble Comics. I think that in all that time only 11 pages of art were produced. Pages of comic art. But that's when I actually started producing pages of THE ELEMENTALS. When Noble finally realized that they didn't have the money, that they couldn't publish, First had started, and **Mike Gustovich** began working for them as an inker. I schlepped out to First Comics with him, and showing my stuff, and that eventually led to my first real comics work.

**DAN:** *With First Comics?*

**BILL:** Yeah.

**DAN:** *Who were your influences?*

**BILL:** As far as comics people, **Neal Adams** was the first — I was amazed with his stuff, that they were allowed to do this in comics. He was my influence for a long time. It wasn't until I saw enough people who weren't in any way influenced by **Adams** but were still what I considered good artists, that I actually felt I could do comics myself. There's a lot of **Adams'** influence. **Jim Aparo**, who's not often alluded to as an influence in comics. I loved his stuff. I'm sure there's quite a bit of that in my work. And **Mike Golden** is the other biggie. Then it's anyone — pick any good artist, and I'm sure some of it creeps into my stuff. It got to the point where I took my entire comics collection and sold it to the local comics store in Grand Rapids one day because I was tired of being so influenced by all these people. I wanted to see my own style start coming out and —

**DAN:** *Not be a Neal Adams clone?*

**BILL:** Not be a **Neal Adams** clone, or a **Jim Aparo** clone, or a **Mike Golden** clone. Not a clone of anyone. So the influences are still there, but now I specifically do not look at their stuff in doing my comics any more.

**DAN:** *How about you, Rich?*

**RICH:** Well, when I first started reading comic books, I really didn't recognize styles so, basically, I was first influenced by characters. At the time DC was on top, and I was really into SUPERMAN, BATMAN, and THE FLASH. Those characters really influenced me to this day. THE JUSTICE LEAGUE. And I guess the first styles that influenced me were those of **Steve Ditko**, of course, and **Jack Kirby** and, later on,

**This page and preceding three: Willingham originals done exclusively for this interview.**

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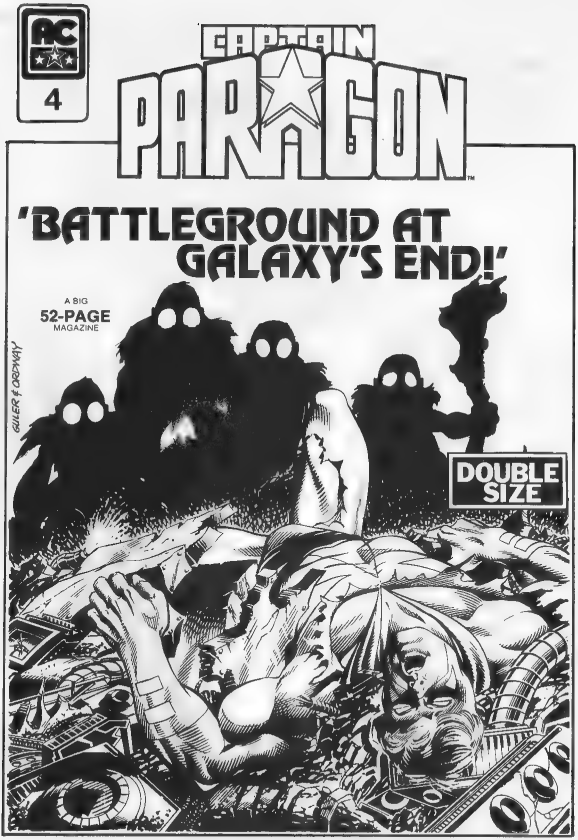
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# "John Byrne had elementals fighting the FF."

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**Berni Wrightson**, whom I was really impressed with. Still am. I think his inking style, although he doesn't just ink, of course, is one of the best in the business. As far as inkers go, **Klaus Janson**, I'd have to say, is my favorite inker. **Akin** and **Garvey** are certainly good. But like Bill said, I try not to be influenced by anyone. I'd rather just do my own style rather than imitate what someone else does.

**DAN:** *How'd the ELEMENTALS come about?*

**BILL:** Well, I always liked doing superhero comics. There's something about a well-muscled man putting on a tight suit and jumping off a building that just, I don't know, *appeals* to a guy. *(Laughter.)* Anyway, I was real interested in doing superhero comics. While working at TSR, I was doing an illustration or whatever for some elemental creatures that wizards could conjure, which were part of a game. And I realized that was an interesting theme for a superhero group. That was back in 1980, when I first got the idea for THE ELEMENTALS, as a superhero team. It got shelved for a while, since I wasn't really doing comics at the time, but it was always in the back of my mind — how was I going to do this, what kind of characters were they going to be, etc. No actual design work was done on them until about '82, when I was in New York, and I was starting to think that rather than going to work for a big company like Marvel or DC, doing their characters, maybe I should work for one of the new independents, doing my own characters instead. THE ELEMENTALS naturally came to mind, By this time I was aware that those kinds of groups have often appeared in comics — in fact, **John Byrne** had done his first FANTASTIC FOUR with elemental creatures fighting the Fantastic Four, things like that. Yet the theme was still appealing, and still for the most part unused, in a major way. At that point, I started to design them. They were more than just visual designs — they automatically suggested their abilities. Earth was strong, air is able to fly, things like that. And then, while I was purportedly working at Noble Comics, that's when the whole concept really started to come together. So it was late '82, early 1983, that THE ELEMENTALS were really, for all intents and purposes, created.

**DAN:** *When you do an issue of THE ELEMENTALS, what do come up with first — your story, or just basic ideas or a plot?*

**BILL:** I started off wanting to draw and that's still mainly what I love to do, so I tend to think visually. All that really exists in writing about any particular book before the artwork is started, is just the roughest of outlines, or jotted-down notes, about what needs to be done in this issue. Drawing is the first actual step that takes place, just from the vaguest of outlines. I don't know anyone else who works that way, but I think it's justifiable because things happen visually. That's how we perceive things. Sound pretty much comes in conjunction with the visuals. And that's how a story is told. A story is told the very, very first time in the artwork. Then I go back and do the writing. I think it's a very good system, because it forces the art to tell the story. You won't find a lot of "this is what's happening"-type captions in the writing, because the art has to do that. Any actual writing is done after the art.

**Rich Rankin's inks on Matt Wagner's version of Marvel's Punisher.**

**DAN:** *And then it's turned over to Rich?*

**BILL:** Well, it's lettered first. I lettered issue #3, but by #4 we may have a new letterer.

**DAN:** *When you give it to Rich, are there special instructions you tell him?*

**BILL:** No style, or you're out the door. *(Laughter.)* I do very, very tight pencils. Most of the information's there. Any instructions I give Rich are when I'm after a very specific special effect, or if he has questions about something he doesn't understand. But most of the information's already there in the pencils.

**DAN:** *You do the coloring also?*

**BILL:** I control the coloring. It's done here in the studio, but the actual colorist is **Janet Jackson**, whose table is right here, and of course my table is right there, and Rich's table is right out there. One of the things I like about the book is that every aspect of THE ELEMENTALS creative-wise is controlled right here in this room, so it's never out of my hands. Selfish as that sounds.

**DAN:** *Tough, that's the way it is.*

**BILL:** Nuff said.

**DAN:** *So, what does the future hold for THE ELEMENTALS?*

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***Morningstar*** has temperatures rising each month in the

Elementals

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# "There's a reason why my people have powers."

**BILL:** Well, we're in the middle of the big story about why they were created. The Elementals were created for a specific purpose, and they're accomplishing that specific purpose now. If you're reading the book, you know pretty much who they're fighting, and by issue #4 you'll know why this whole conflict's come about. I don't want to give the storyline away

**DAN:** *Aachoo!*

**BILL:** That's all right. Sneeze. *(Together with Rte:)* Oh Dan, use a tissue!

**DAN:** (Laughter.) *What's going to happen after the current storyline?*

**BILL:** This particular storyline, with them resolving the conflict they were created to resolve, ends in issue #5. Then they go home. Since issue #1, they've been away from home in Seattle. They go home. They find out that the government's been pretty active, the government's pretty interested in knowing why super-powered people exist, so there's a storyline that spins off of that, where a splinter group of the government that doesn't actually have the authority they think they do, tries to take a more forceful hand in containing The Elementals. One of the first things we establish is that the government doesn't know what their policy's going to be on this. In the meantime, they are considering keeping The Elementals contained, until they *do* establish policy, but they decide not to go ahead with that — one of the main reasons being that these are *powerful* things, so maybe they couldn't contain them. And The Elementals also have some top-notch legal help to keep government hands off them. Some of the foreshadowings of all this started in issue #2.

Thematically in THE ELEMENTALS, there's a very specific reason why people have powers. Superpowers. That is defined, I think, starting with issue #7, by showing the government starting scientific investigations to find out how they got their powers, how the Destroyers got their power, how the main bad guy in the first five issues got his. They begin to see a pattern forming, and they go with that. They start to find other people who have had similar experiences, and they find out that, by gosh, maybe they have abilities, too. So that starts some problems for The Elementals, because they find other people who have had similar experiences, and not all of them are pleasant people. So, talking about the next year, that's a lot of what is going on in the book. And in the Elementals' "Universe," there's only one real access to paranormal powers — so that's the whole thing for the next year.

**DAN:** *Speaking of universes, how do you feel about THE ELEMENTALS being compared to other superhero comics —*

**BILL:** Comparisons are made. Immediate comparisons are made by people who don't look at the book. When some of the Marvel people at a party in Chicago, just subsequent to the release of #1, talked to me about the book, they referred to Fathom as a skinny She-Hulk, they referred to

**Wraparound cover illustration from Comico's surprise bestseller, THE ELEMENTALS #1, in which the heroes face off against their foes, The Destroyers.**

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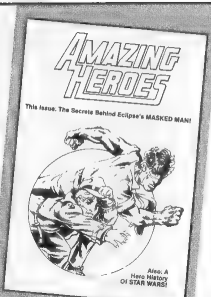


# "I've killed two companies — or is it four?"

Monolith as the Thing ripoff, *etcetera*. Whether those comparisons are fair or not, they are being made. The standard ones are that Fathom is a ripoff of Marrina in ALPHA FLIGHT, but that visually, she's a ripoff of She-Hulk. Monolith is a direct ripoff of the Thing, Morningstar is a ripoff of Phoenix, and I haven't really gotten one for Vortex yet, but we're working on it. And these are all made on peripheral evidence, I think. Any real examination of the characters would show that this is not the case. Specifically, even in the case of Marrina, I would have to say that **Mr. Byrne** at one of the small Chicago mini-cons, saw my character Fathom long before Marrina was invented — or, at least, long before any announcement of that character appeared. As far as any resemblance to She-Hulk — Fathom's green, She-Hulk is green — but, gosh, so are a host of other comic-book characters. I think the Morningstar-Phoenix comparison comes as a result of a fiery temper. As you start reading the book, you're going to realize that this is not the case. Morningstar is not a Dark Phoenix, she's not being seduced by her powers, nor is she evil inside. She is tempestuous — that is her personality. It's not going to turn bad, it's not going to turn on her. It's just her personality, and her power has no basis for comparison to Phoenix's. Superheroes up until recently have been so goody-goody all the time, that now that there are characters popping up who have a less idealistic attitude towards their work, comparisons are inevitable. I even know a few people made immediate visual comparisons and decided not to read the book. So, who cares? There are obviously a lot of people who *are* willing to read the book, a lot of people who *are* able to see things.

**DAN:** *So what does the future hold for Bill Willingham and Rich Rankin?*

**BILL:** I'm going to try to continue with THE ELEMENTALS for a while, because I've got a lot of specific stories to tell. In the meantime, I've started doing some work outside of Comico. There's been talk about doing a mini-series for Marvel, but that's not happening soon. In the meantime, I've been doing work for DC. My issue of BATMAN AND THE OUTSIDERS came out at about the same time as THE ELEMENTALS #1. Just did a GREEN LANTERN fill-in, an ATARI FORCE fill-in, and there's a specific series proposal of mine that is being considered by DC right now. They've made very clear that they want me to work for them on a regular basis, so I will most likely be with DC, preferably on a regular series.

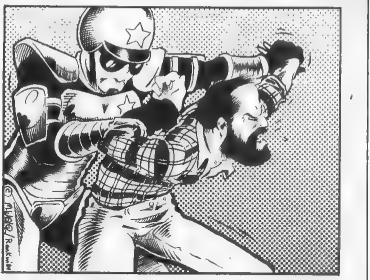
**DAN:** *Rich?*

**RICH:** Well, I'm also doing some work for DC right now. I just finished inking the issue of GREEN LANTERN that Bill pencilled, and I'll probably be doing the ATARI FORCE that he drew. I'm also going to be inking a mini-series which won't appear until next summer, with **Matt Wagner** writing and pencilling it, featuring **Jack Kirby's** Demon character. Basically, I hope to continue the relationship with DC for quite some time to come — both Bill and I are very pleased with the atmosphere up there. A very pleasant group of people to work for, up at DC Comics. A terribly enjoyable experience.

**DAN:** *Do you enjoy working for the independents?*

**BILL:** How much time do we have left?

**DAN:** *Oh, we've got plenty of time.*




More Wagner/Rankin art for Fantasy Games, Unltd.

**BILL:** Plenty of time for a lawsuit . . . where's **Gary Groth** when you need him . . .? Actually, it's okay, with some specific reservations. I've worked for a lot of independent companies. Gosh, I've killed two of them. Trying to get THE ELEMENTALS out, two of them have bit the dust. So I'm working on the third, naturally. Actually, it's up in the air whether you can say I'm responsible for the death of two or four companies. Noble and Texas Comics each died trying to publish THE ELEMENTALS, but Capital Comics also died shortly after we had a tentative agreement for me to do a BADGER fill-in, but before I actually got any of the script. So I don't know if we can count that one. And I was going to do a pin-up for **John Carbonaro's** comics

BILL WILLINGHAM

# "Religions are political institutions.

shortly before the company died. So, two or four — take your pick.

Anyway, the independents are good, especially in the rights they let you retain. The rights to your own stuff. One of the problems I've had with the independents that I've worked for is that as great as it is that they're not like the two big companies, because the creator gets to own everything — the balancing factor is a boatload of inexperience in publishing. To the point that, in almost every case with the independents I've worked for, the publishers have had the attitude that, "My word, do we really need to pay these people to publish their stuff? We know we need to pay the printers, the separators, the production men, and we need to pay for ads and stuff — but why do we need to pay these people, since we're publishing their stuff? Aren't they happy to have their stuff published?" I'm not including all of the independents. But this has been a very common experience. So even though the rights are good and the ownership is good, I think the lack of experience among independent publishers is a tremendous problem. Unfortunately, a lot of the independent publishers are comics fans, grown up, putting some money together and just deciding to publish their own line — with no more experience than that behind starting the business. And it's sort of a learn-as-we-go-along-type thing. Naturally, you make a plethora of mistakes as you go along, and some of these mistakes have drastic results for people whose living is supposedly made by doing this.

**DAN:** *Do you see any more independent companies springing up in the future?*

**BILL:** I don't know. The death rate's so high right now among the companies that combined with the hysteria currently with us, founded or not, over the supposed Marvel "dump" — I think a lot of people who would probably be getting in to publishing their own comics right now are shying away from it. But about once a month I'm contacted by some new company that wants to put a whole new company together around a book of mine, so I guess they're still out there. I think the death rate among independents is going to remain high, because as far as I can tell, there was only one company that was really put together solidly before they started publishing their first book. Which is essential. Any company that's interested in publishing that doesn't do that, that doesn't have some business sense, will probably not make it.

**DAN:** *So what else do you feel strongly about?*

**BILL:** The 700 Club! They hate comics. Aren't they a bowling organization?

**DAN:** *That's what the name sounds like. They may well be, after comics fans get through with them.*

**BILL:** Religion, as we know —as any right-thinking individual can recognize — is based upon some pretty standard concepts no matter *what* the religion is. One of them is limiting information. If their followers question too much, if they have access to too much information, then they're going to start finding things that don't jive with the ideological world view of that particular religion. So any formalized religion has to, if they're going to advance beyond a certain cult status, they have to start controlling the experiences and the environment of their membership. So, inevitably, any formalized religious institution becomes political. Religions are political institutions. You can't have one without the other. Every religion is political. They have to control information, they have to gain authority and power. Any strong questioning or strong availability of different viewpoints has to be wiped out. That's why right now the people who are coming out lambasting comic books, role-playing games, whatever, are actually engaged in a revival of the popularity of book-burning. Their actions are based upon attitudes of intolerance. "We cannot tolerate anything outside of our own ideol-

**"I was doing the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ads in Marvel comics. I was under a lot of pressure to have the character put his sword in its sheath."**

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# You can't have one without the other."

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"...THE ELEMENTALS."
"I OBSERVED THEM FOR SEVERAL DAYS AS THEY CONDUCTED COMBAT TRAINING. AS YOU CAN SEE THEY ARE SUCCESSFUL PRIMARILY IN GETTING IN EACH OTHER'S WAY."
"THEIR ABILITIES APPARENTLY CORRESPOND TO THE FOUR LEGENDARY ELEMENTS OF NATURE."

**From the Elementals' first appearance in JUSTICE MACHINE #1. Pencils by Willingham, inks by Bill Anderson.**

ogy." If the outside information was available, then the membership of their particular religion would be able to find the inherent contradictions between their ideology and visible evidence. *Contradictory* evidence.

Religions have to create a political state around them or, pretty soon, people are going to find out that they're not really living in a religious society, not living in a society that follows their religion. And yet, God's not coming down out of the sky and wiping these other poor sons-of-bitches out. That's why these same groups are intolerant of Jewish people, intolerant of blacks. These are all political activities, political prejudices, brought under the auspicies of the church, because the church has to control their people.

High-ranking church members are power-seekers. That's another inescapable combination. If you're going to rise high in your church, you're going after power. And not just spiritual power. We're talking material power . . . it's a power kick. I used to be heavily involved in the church, even to the point of giving the sermons, occasionally. And there's a power kick there that you would not believe. It's a rush that has no comparison. And the best drugs you can find aren't going to give you the same kind of kick as the ability to manipulate a couple of hundred people by talking to them. And this

Little Wendy went to church
but she didn't go to pray...

For in this church the
cross dripped blood

and little girls were
brought to slay.

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# 'BLOOD RITES!'

by Steve Ringgenberg, Mark Heitz and Bill Anderson

Distributed by Bud Plant, Glenwood, SeaGate, Pacific, Styx, Capital City, Longhorn, and Diamond.

# "DUNGEONS & DRAGONS drew flak."

breeds the desire for more. The 700 Club is an organization that is seeking power. To do that, they have to get rid of anything they perceive as an adversary. That's why comics are on the chopping block. That's why a shitload of books, records, magazines, role-playing games, whole sub-cultures in the United States are on the hit list. They have to be removed, because those are areas of power that the church doesn't have.

So, their reaction to comics is not that important. They may perceive it in terms of a spiritual threat, when actually it's nothing more mundane than another aspect of their need to grab power. Material power. Political power. As a result, it's hard to get too worked up about it, because either the Couch Potatoes that occupy America currently are going to let them do it — or they're not.

We're either going to have a real interesting struggle on our hands, or we're going to have a society that's going to sit around and let themselves be taken over. In either case, the strongest group is going to end up with the power, which it always does and always has. I don't think it's going to be resolved so quickly that I'm going to be out of a job in the next five years. And I doubt it's going to come in the form of another purge of comics, like in the Fifties with — what the hell was his name? **Wertham**, and the whole Senate investigation. It's going to happen more as back-of-the-church comics burnings.

I may draw more flak than many when it comes out that there's a very religious background to the power that a lot of my characters fling around. Religious — in a very twisted sense. As a matter of fact, one of the more diabolical characters in my script owes his ability to the activities of a very popular figure in American religion. So, who knows, maybe we'll draw lots of flak, lots of controversy, and that'll be fine. A nice big fight.

**DAN:** *How do you think the comics industry at large is going to deal with the whole religious controversy?*

**BILL:** I don't know enough about the comic-book industry to really judge, but I can draw some comparisons to the gaming industry. DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS, the game — because it involves a lot of things, like your characters can involve themselves in demonology, things like that — drew a lot of religious flak right away. And working at TSR, we heard pretty much all of it. Everything that was directed at us we'd hear about, eventually. So we got the impression that we were being deluged with persecution from religious groups, demanding or proclaiming that DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS was an evil, demonic thing.

The company's reaction to that was just about the wimpiest, most spinelessly disgusting thing you can ever imagine. Basically, it was scared to death. Anything that would happen, we would have to adjust our views immediately to respond to that, as if there was an immediate threat.

For example, when it became apparent that the nature of the game was causing a lot of controversy, I was doing the DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS ads in the back of Marvel comics, and there were some very strict rules laid down as to what I could not do. DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS is a game where you play medieval sword-and sorcery characters, kill monsters or fight battles in order to get those monsters' or demonic sorcerers' treasures, and then, by gaining treasure, you gain experience points and get better at killing monsters and kill

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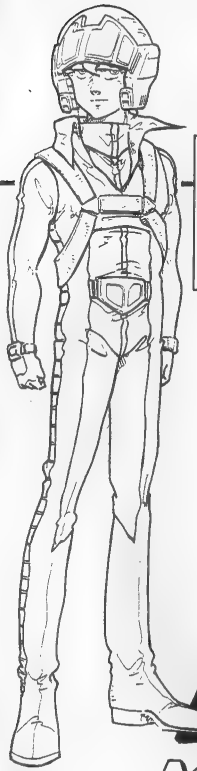

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# "The companies have no real backbone."

ing evil sorcerers and getting more treasure, in a kind of circle where you build a super character out of the character you started as. I was under very strict instructions on things I could not show. The very first one of these things I did showed a character going down a darkened corridor with a sword out. I was under a lot of pressure to have him put the sword in a sheath, because we didn't want people to think this was a violent game, and if the sword is sheathed, it's not so violent, If it's out, it looks like he's ready to do violence. I got that through. We weren't supposed to show magic being done in any well-played-up ways, because then the churches would freak because we're showing magic, which they equate with Satanism. They would freak. So we can't show magic. We couldn't show them grubbing and grabbing up treasure, because that would show that the game is promoting greed. We couldn't actually show fights happening, because they didn't want the mommies out there to think that this was a violent thing. There was a whole character class called Clerics — which are religious people, using religious power directly from their god to do magic things like healing — so I had to wipe the whole class of Clerics out. Couldn't use them, because that would get the churches upset. So, that's why you have a lot of those little strips that start out with the characters walking down a corridor, they get in a bad situation, and then leave it as a cliffhanger, and then the next one says, "Well, after they got out of that bad situation, they're continuing on down the corridor..." They were afraid to show any aspects of what the game was about, because they were getting this response from the Christian community.

So, their attitude toward the church was to wimp out, to give in, to panic at each indication that there may be some controversy. Even though, when the controversy occurred, the sales of the game skyrocketed! In the James Alan Egbert thing, the whole thing about the guy who supposedly died playing the game, the controversy caused sales of DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS to skyrocket. But TSR was still scared to death about it. I think that may be an indication of what's going to happen as soon as the comic companies have any kind of organized flak heading their way. I'm certain they're going to turn tail and run.

If anything, it's only going to be the independents, the I-don't-give-a-damn-this-is-not-that-big-a-company type people, who will ignore it. First Comics' policy right now is to ignore the Comics Code.They don't preach against it, they don't do things actively to oppose it, they just flat ignore it. Okay. So I'm sure that it's going to get worse before it gets better. They've come out in public against comic books, among a plethora of other things. It's going to be an adversary thing. I think comics will lose — if it ever comes to it — because the companies have no real backbone. They don't see the church as an adversary, in the way the church perceives comics as an adversary. The whole thing revolves around an attitude of intolerance. I don't know, I guess humans

**The offending olfactory.**

are a species that cannot tolerate differences among themselves. It's everywhere. Even within comics, there's the same attitude. We find things to rally against. Right now — women's tits, in comics. That's the big shibboleth of our times. Big tits in comics is just the worst kind of thing, and it's rallied against by people, by mindless couch-creatures who can't think for themselves, who jump behind the catch phrases without really thinking them through.

At the last Chicago convention, I had a young lady approach me, criticizing me about the size of Fathom's breasts, because apparently I'm just a male chauvinist with a need to have this specific view of what women are like, and I can't get outside of that, because I have her breasts a certain dimension. It was obvious that she did not even think her situation through, because she was just reciting by rote a common thing that you're supposed to say. "What, she's got big tits, are you hung up on big tits?" That's a thing you have to say it you're supposed to be an enlightened comic reader now. You're required to, because the very next thing she said was, "Why does she have a crooked nose. That makes her ugly. Why doesn't she have a nose like the rest of females in comics?" It was obvious that she'd not thought through what she was trying to say. But there she was, was rallying around the flag. Gosh, let's wipe out tits in comics. All women should have small breasts. But don't make them ugly — get that crooked nose out of there, that kind of thing. It's just stupid and ridiculous.

I just had a letter in the back of THE ELEMENTALS #1, where the person remarked that only the women got undressed. There was a clear scene where one of the guys took off his clothes, too. He couldn't see it! It was unable to be perceived. We're so programmed to notice everything that involves women in comics, in a derogatory sense, that that's what we perceive in comics treatment on. We're supposed to notice tits, and if a woman's undressing, It's another attitude of intolerance.

The point is that the intolerance exists everywhere. It's just that in the religious aspect it's very organized. I mean, they have a whole program and plan of procedure. Whereas we just have disorganized vogue pop culture intolerance, that is just more of a silly and stupid headache than anything else.

**DAN:** *What do you think, Rich?*

**RICH:** What he says. *(Laughter.)*

**DAN:** *That narrows that down. That should be it, then?*

**BILL:** So I'm not going to be afraid of offending people in my comic. Screw the money. I'm interested in telling stories to people who will think for themselves. And the intolerant people every where are —

**DAN:** *They're intolerable.*

**BILL:** No, they're just something that has to be tolerated as part of the environment.

**DAN:** *I feel like seeing INTOLERANCE now.* (Laughter.)

**BILL:** I've got a question for you. Have we used the word "intolerance" enough?

**DAN:** *I think I'm going to end the interview before it gets intolerable.*

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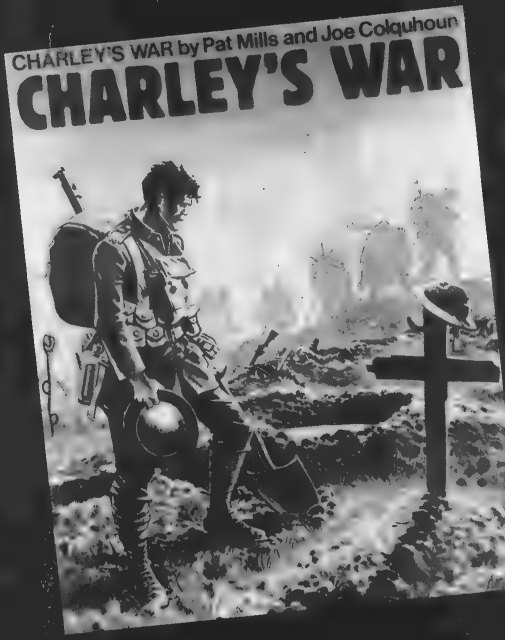
# WORLD WAR 1. 1914.

**A TIME OF DEATH AND DESPAIR IN THE MUDDY TRENCHES ON THE WESTERN FRONT. THIS IS THE STORY OF 16 YEAR OLD CHARLEY BOURNE, A NAIVE YOUTH WHO FOUGHT IN THAT WAR. THIS IS . . .**

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# "How are you going to make a comic out of such a static subject as trench warfare?"

Photo: Terry McGee

# JOE COLQUHOUN

*"Charley's War" is a widely popular, highly acclaimed, intensely realistic World War I saga running in the British comic-weekly, BATTLE. Titan Books — publisher of JUDGE DREDD collections — has now brought this ground-breaking strip to America in the form of a graphic album, and since most American fans will be seeing his art for the first time, COMICS INTERVIEW brings you this interview with "Charley's War" artist, Joe Colquhoun (pronounced "Co-hoon").*

*Joe has been called "the ultimate British comics artist." His career has covered the period from the first boom in adventure-comics, in the 1950s, to the present day, when — with the addition of credit-lines in BATTLE — he has finally won the recognition due a veteran of thirty years in comics. Speaking with British fan Stephen Oldham, Joe humorously and modestly discussed his sudden lionization, traced the influence of American artists on his work, and wondered about the liberalization of strictures against sex and violence in comics . . .*

**STEPHEN OLDHAM:** *How do you feel about the acclaim — from fans and professionals alike — that "Charley's War" is receiving?*

**JOE COLQUHOUN:** First of all, I'm gratified and quite surprised that it's viewed so favorably even by upmarket intellectuals. I was astounded that one learned professor equated it with ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT as a social document. That seemed a bit high-flying for me though I'm beginning to understand it in a way, thanks to the inspiration and dedication of **Pat Mills**, which has rubbed off on me. I don't want to let him down. I'm very interested in the subject, even though I find it very depressing and emotive. Particularly the sequence at the end of the Battle of the Somme. You'll find it hard to believe, but when I re-read that in its printed version I was close to tears. Just shows you how involved you can get.

When I was first asked to take on "Charley's War," I told the editor, "God Almighty, how are you going to make a comic out of such a static subject as trench warfare?" **Dave Hunt**, the editor at the time, said, "We've got a damn good author. He'll pull it through." I'd never met Pat or known of him, and I was still skeptical, but as it developed I began to realize that we were on to something. I've tried very hard to bring out the realism in the story, and most of the sequences are based on factual incidents. That might lead to an authenticity that is possibly lacking in the more blood-and-thunder, action-packed World War II stories. "Charley's War" illustrates a period — which was already dying then — when words like Honor, Duty and Patriotism

JOE COLQUHOUN

# "CHARLEY'S WAR illustrates a period when

meant something. I think most decent kids reading about that epoch will have a sneaking, almost atavistic feeling that in this present, rather sick and selfish world, where violence and amorality seem to pay dividends, they may be missing out on something.

**STEPHEN:** *Why did you enter the comics field, Joe?*

**JOE:** I'd always wanted to draw, ever since I was old enough to pick up a pencil. I spent all my spare time drawing. In fact, when I was young, I got hold of an old ledger and used to draw page after page of stories I'd made up, mostly in the adventure line — including war stories, which, I suppose, served me in good stead for what was to come.

**STEPHEN:** *Did you read comics when you were young?*

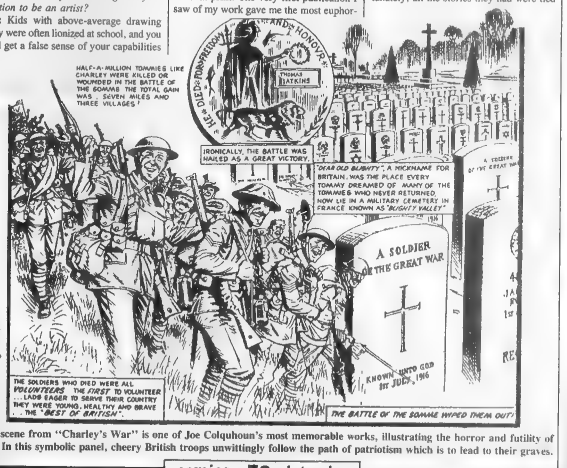
**JOE:** I was brought up on the usual diet most kids had in those days — "Comic Cuts," we used to call them. Then there were the "tu'penny Bloods" — MAGNET, CHAMPION, TRIUMPH, WIZARD, and HOTSPUR, which were text stories with one-off illustrations, and very well written for what you paid for them.

**STEPHEN:** *Were you encouraged in your ambition to be an artist?*

**JOE:** Kids with above-average drawing ability were often lionized at school, and you could get a false sense of your capabilities at the time because there was no competition. Though I was interested in the comic strips, it wasn't really my ambition to be an artist. The war was about to start and we didn't think much of the future. But I managed to join a local art school, Kingston-On-Thames, about halfway through the war, and did a short spell before joining the Navy. I came out of the Navy about 1947, and went back to the art school on a more prolonged course in book illustration. This knocked a lot of the rough edges and crudities off my work. I still had a dormant hankering to do comic strips, but the field was very, very limited at the time. EAGLE had just come out, but at that stage of my development I realized I hadn't a hope in hell of getting in there. Then, suddenly I saw an advertisement in a trade magazine for artists to submit samples to a new project publishing independent comics. I jumped at this with alacrity. They seemed quite pleased with my work, although, as I subsequently found out, with the low fees they paid they should have been glad to get anybody. Our work was crude and rushed — it had to be. The printing was atrocious, and though we had a foothold in the market we rarely saw our work in print. The very first publication I saw of my work gave me the most euphoric feeling I've ever had. It's like having your first woman, I suppose . . . never to be repeated.

**STEPHEN:** *What kind of stories were you doing?*

**JOE:** One-off stories — war, westerns, space, espionage — very American oriented, fairly well written, all done by Yanks. I was there for seven or eight months and didn't earn a fortune though I learned speed and a certain amount of slickness. However, the general consensus was that the outfit was done for. We hadn't gotten paid for a hell of a time. I had just gotten married and things were pretty grim. With nothing to lose, I managed to get an interview with the editor of EAGLE. I showed him the specimens I'd managed to salvage from the Americans, and he was very compassionate but it was obviously not quite what he wanted. He said, "Why don't you go across to AP" — Amalgamated Press — "and show your material to them? They've just brought out a new comic called LION." So I thought, "What's to lose?" At AP I saw another nice chap, Stan Boddington. LION was a bit more down-market than EAGLE, and he seemed quite impressed. Unfortunately, all the stories they had were tied


HALF-A-MILLION TOMMIES LIKE CHARLEY WERE KILLED OR WOUNDED IN THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME. THE TOTAL GAIN WAS... SEVEN MILES AND THREE VILLAGES!
HE DIED FOR FREEDOM AND HONOUR
THOMAS FLETCHER
IRONICALLY THE BATTLE WAS HAILED AS A GREAT VICTORY.
"DEAR OLD BLIGHTY", A NICKNAME FOR BRITAIN, WAS THE PLACE EVERY TOMMY DREAMED OF. MANY OF THE TOMMIES WHO NEVER RETURNED NOW LIE IN A MILITARY CEMETERY IN FRANCE KNOWN AS "BLIGHTY VALLEY"
A SOLDIER OF THE GREAT WAR
THE SOLDIERS WHO DIED WERE ALL VOLUNTEERS. THE FIRST TO VOLUNTEER ... LADS EAGER TO SERVE THEIR COUNTRY THEY WERE YOUNG, HEALTHY AND BRAVE ... THE "BEST OF BRITISH".
KNOWN UNTO GOD 1ST JULY, 1916
THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME WIPED THEM OUT!
© 1982 IPC Magazines, Ltd

**This scene from "Charley's War" is one of Joe Colquhoun's most memorable works, illustrating the horror and futility of war. In this symbolic panel, cheery British troops unwittingly follow the path of patriotism which is to lead to their graves.**

# honor, duty and patriotism meant something."

up. In desperation I said, "Of course, I write scripts as well." In truth, I'd never written any scripts in my life! *(Laughter.)* So, influenced by my US debut, I flogged out a story about the Navy in the Pacific war. My synopsis produced an epic of one-hundred installments, ranging from a fairly logical beginning to a rambling climax. It didn't go down too well. They ironed it out in story conference and we condensed it down to a neat four-story job! Then they relegated me to the struggling CHAMPION, which was still mainly text stories. They did have a two-page centerspread, and they got me to write and draw another epic, which ran for forty-four installments, called "Legionnaire Terry's Desert Quest," which was all very much my own work with very little interference from the sub-editors who subsequently became the bane of my life in scriptwriting.

**STEPHEN:** *In those early days, who were your main artistic influences?*

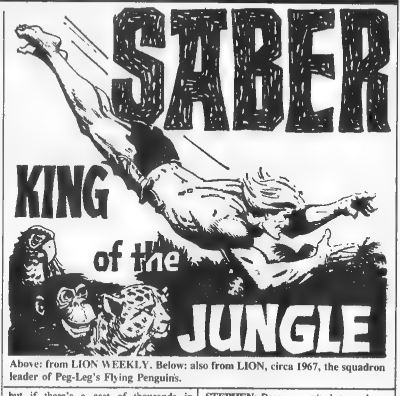
**JOE:** In this field, **Alex Raymond** of RIP KIRBY fame influenced me the most. I thought he was a genius. His economy, his distinct style — a super ratio of black and white, a minimum of hatching — it was the quintessence of what I felt I'd be happy to emulate. Raymond's influence stayed with me a long time, until my own technique and style developed. If the influence still shows, I'd be bloody happy.

**STEPHEN:** *Were you subject to a lot of editorial pressures back then?*

**JOE:** Yes, we really were limited. At the time there was almost a boarding school, monastic mentality in the strict censorship. You were never allowed to mention women. Once, I managed to bring in Roy's landlady, and even that was suspect. Perhaps they played down to the readers too much then . . . and perhaps they play up too high above the readers now. I used to get very frustrated because I think it's awfully difficult for an adult writer to relate to the mind of a youngster.

**STEPHEN:** *Have the weekly schedules caused you many problems?*

**JOE:** From the beginning, serialization has been one of the world's worst ways to make a living. From time to time, the deadlines and pressures become pretty punitive. The worst thing is when you're trying to get ahead for a holiday, and up comes bloody Easter and the office rings you up to say you've got to gain another four days. When you're working six or seven days a week, it's practically impossible — but somehow you do it. Nowadays I take on as little work as I can do and still remain solvent. I try to work Monday to Friday, regular hours,




**Above: from LION WEEKLY. Below: also from LION, circa 1967, the squadron leader of Peg-Leg's Flying Penguins.**

but if there's a cast of thousands in CHARLEY'S WAR with the regiment going over the top, it takes a lot longer.

**STEPHEN:** *Does your attitude toward your work vary, depending on the job you're doing?*

**JOE:** I think I can say, with a certain satisfaction, that I've always tried to do the best I can in any job, for my own pride as well as to justify my wages. Of course, bad scripts do have a depressing effect. I know I feel happier when I have a rapport with the author, even if I've never met the guy. I think I've always tended to put a bit more into my work than some of my colleagues. I think they're wiser — they seem to have learned the economy of line, and omission is always more difficult than over-working. My main failing is that I tend to put in everything *and* the kitchen sink. A lot of it gets lost in reproduction, and therefore, in strict terms, is a waste of time. And in this game, time is money. In that respect I've been a bit of a mug, but the leopard can't change its spots.

**STEPHEN:** *Do you have difficulty getting a change of jobs when you're becoming bored with the strip you're working on?*

**JOE:** Since I've been on BATTLE, I've felt no desire to change. But when I was working on "Roy of the Rovers" I found it a bit of a bore, not being a great fan of soccer. Four or five years of drawing those bloody hairy-arsed footballers got me down. I wanted the "Paddy Payne" slot in LION, and it took me a hell of a job to get off "Roy."

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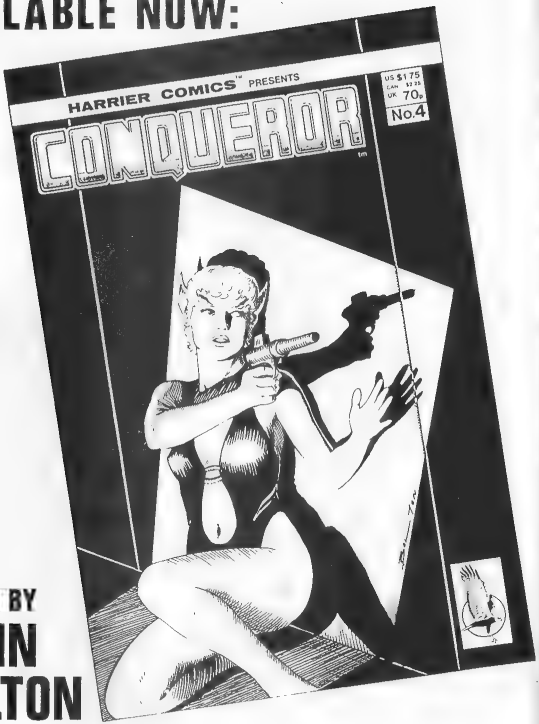


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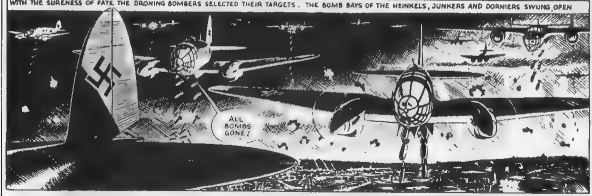
JOE COLQUHOUN

# "The realism is censored out."


WITH THE SURENESS OF FATE, THE DRONING BOMBERS SELECTED THEIR TARGETS. THE BOMB BAYS OF THE HEINKELS, JUNKERS AND DORNIERS SWUNG OPEN
ALL BOMBS GONE!

**Panel from the "Paddy Payne, Warrior of the Skies" series in LION WEEKLY during the early Sixties.**

The continual ploy of the editors was to say, "We can't get anyone else to do it" — but if it had come to the crunch they'd have found another bloke within five seconds. I'm sure of it. In fact, when I finally insisted I wanted a change, they *did* find someone else to do "Roy," and do it pretty successfully, as far as I can see. The main problem — even bigger than the inertia of editors — was finding another artist willing to vacate the spot you wanted. And the inertia did exist. Around the late 1950s, early 1960s, there definitely seemed to be/a conspiracy of editors to keep you in the same slot, if it was proving successful. I had a bit of a job wangling onto BATTLE.

**STEPHEN:** *Was your agent helpful?*

**JOE:** I've never had an agent, I'm glad to say, as they take — what is it — 20 percent off one's earnings, which is a fair old slice on top of the income tax and National Insurance.

**STEPHEN:** *What about the new look that BATTLE PICTURE WEEKLY started in 1975?*

**JOE:** The arrival of BATTLE, ACTION, and their companion papers seemed to coincide with a lessening of restrictions all around, with the impact of such films as JAWS. Prior to that you never saw a man's legs floating down to the bottom of the sea with all the blood and guts falling out. Violence or horror was only suggested. BATTLE and ACTION tended to emulate this new realism. It probably was a good thing in some respects, but then they tried to take it as far as they could until it was stamped down. Far more was allowed in BATTLE when I first started on it than is allowed now. I'm not too sorry about that, having seen a bit of violence myself. As long as we don't get back to that monastic censorship of the Fifties and early Sixties, a happy compromise is the ideal. The one thing I can't quite reconcile myself to is the dialogue. It's a Cockney regiment, and initially Charley spoke in the Cockney idiom: "Arf a mo', mate." But now, though Pat still writes in that vein, still trying to maintain the realism, invariably it's censored out. Now it's "Half a moment." That sounds crazy to me. Too stilted!

**STEPHEN:** *During your long comics career, were you aware there was such a thing as organized fandom?*

**JOE:** Not until comparatively recently. I am quite intrigued by it.

**STEPHEN:** *Do you think fandom is useful in any way?*

**JOE:** It serves as a recruiting ground — a good training ground for up-and-coming artists who may desire to become professional. From my point of view — and I'm sure for a lot of other artists — being in contact with chaps like you is a very good barometer to find out what's happening, what the current trends are, and the general gossip in the field. I, for one, don't get much information from any other source — certainly not from the office. They're so busy, it's like getting blood from a stone.

**STEPHEN:** *How do you see comics in Great Britain developing?*

**JOE:** If costs can be kept to a reasonable level and inflation doesn't get out of hand, I would hazard a somewhat pessimistic guess that they'll stay virtually the same in format and story content. Rather sobering thought, that. I've a feeling they've passed their heyday and will never be as prolific again. In an ideal world, I'd like to see some vigorous company take up the challenge, like the old EAGLE did in the 1950s. I'd like to see a batch of new publications to combat the stagnation. Lots of full-color work by good artists. And on that, here endeth the first lesson.

Photo: Terry McGee

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DC
Worlds will live. Worlds will die.
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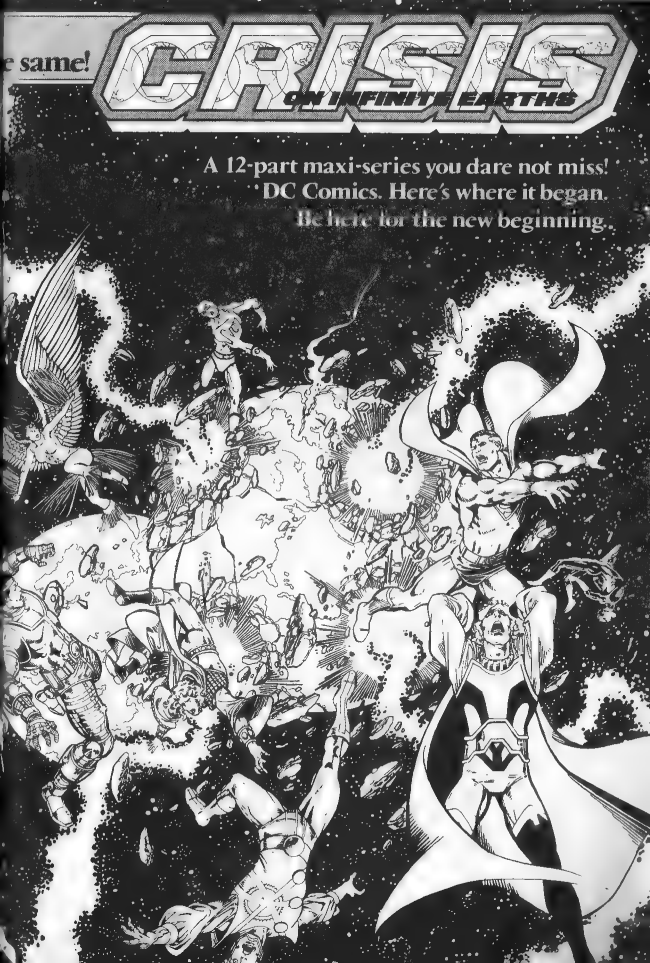
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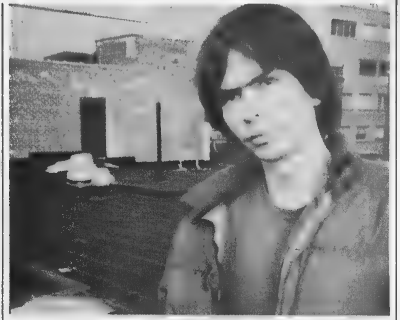
# "People told me I was getting too old for

*Little-known Sandy Plunkett won considerable attention for his pencilling on a SPIDER-MAN story (inked by Craig Russell) in MARVEL FANFARE #6. Since then, Sandy's been getting favorable notices for his DEFENDERS covers and other art for Marvel. anting more, always on the lookout for new artistic heroes, I vowed to meet Plunkett, if only to express my great pleasure at encountering his work. And when I finally did meet him, I was pleasantly surprised to find that he was a friendly, unassuming fellow in his 20s, not too far from my age. With his intelligent, liquid brown eyes and round boyish face, Sandy gave the impression of being much younger than he actually is. But, that impression was quickly dispelled when Sandy opened his portfolio and began pulling out reams of drawings, sketches and roughs: a whole menagerie of cavemen, barbarians, and beautiful women sprang to vivid life on the pages, and each drawing seemed more impressive and technically accomplished than the last.*

*The better I got to know Sandy, the more I liked him for his quiet humor and genial, easygoing ways. My respect for his artistic skills continued to grow as I talked to him and saw the actual fruits of his labors. Fans may joke about Sandy's speed (or lack thereof), but that is only a measure of the pains he takes with each new piece. No matter how well anything comes out, Sandy is always struggling with the eternal conflict of craftsmanship* versus *deadlines, and with the problem of keeping super-heroes from looking like sissies.*



## VITAL STATISTICS

**Name:** Sandy Plunkett
**Occupation:** Freelance Illustrator
**Residence:** New York City, NY
**Born:** 18 October 1956 — Williamsport, PA
**Credits:** SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN illos, THE DEFENDERS, MARVEL FANFARE #6, various stories for the mystery and war titles of DC and Gold Key. And a lot of boring advertising work.
**Favorite Comics:** Kaluta's "Carson of Venus," Raboy's CAPTAIN MARVEL, JR. Williamson's science-fiction stories for EC were probably the biggest influence on me
**Favorite Artists:** Joseph Clement Coll, J. Allen St. John and Frank Frazetta.
**Favorite Tools:** Windsor-Newton Series 7, No. 2 brush, a #2 pencil
**Favorite Movie:** McCABE & MRS. MILLER

**STEVE RINGGENBERG:** *Sandy, you seem to have come virtually out of nowhere, and you made quite a splash with your story in MARVEL FANFARE #6. What's your background in comics?*

**SANDY PLUNKETT:** Well, I didn't come out of nowhere. I've been doing artwork commercially for six or seven years. I've done some illustrating for DC, and some for Gold Key and a couple of other places — filler pieces — but my first major work was issue #6 of MARVEL FANFARE.

**STEVE:** *What kind of stuff were you doing fo DC and Gold Key?*

**SANDY:** For DC, I was doing war and mystery. For Gold Key, BORIS KARLOFF TALES OF MYSTERY and books like that.

**STEVE:** *So you were drawing basically the same kind of mystery stories that DC was doing?*

**SANDY:** Basically. A little bit worse in the writing, if you can believe it.

**STEVE:** *How much formal training have you had, Sandy?*

**SANDY:** Well, it depends on how you view it. I went to college as an art student for one year at the state university at Purchase. Almost nothing I did there pertained in any way to comic-book work There was one drawing class where you used live models, and the basic thing that the teacher emphasized was not to draw what you saw in front of you, but to express yourself, and I almost flunked out because I kept drawing the model. Aside from that, I basically learned comics by doing comics.

**STEVE:** *How did you get into advertising?*

**SANDY:** I never got into advertising too intensively. I hung out at Continuity Studios a few years back when **Carl Potts** was there, along with **Terry Austin, Joe Rubinstein,** that whole crowd, and every now and then I would get a phone call to do work for an agency, or I'd work as an assistant for people there.

**STEVE:** *Did you ever assist Neal Adams?*

**SANDY:** No Not directly. He actually got me my first script from DC, which he was going to ink, but **Klaus Janson** inked it.

**STEVE:** *Do you ink as well as pencil?*

**SANDY:** Well, yeah, I do. I'm still very skittish about inking and I'm trying to build up my confidence Right now, I'm working on pencils more, and hopefully there'll come a point when the idea of inking my work isn't so frightening.

**STEVE:** *What do you do to consciously improve your work?*

**SANDY:** I look at everything I can — other people's artwork and photographs, and I study from life as much as I can. What you're putting down on paper is information, basically: information on how the muscles work in an arm, or how a piece of cloth

**comics. I was stupid enough to listen to them."**

# SANDY PLUNKETT

drapes. You try and get as much information as you can and keep absorbing it.

**STEVE:** *Do you see comics as a sort of visual shorthand for the way things actually look?*

**SANDY:** I wouldn't have chosen that word but it's not a bad one. Just out of necessity you have to simplify. So it is a kind of a shorthand.

**STEVE:** *Have you been a fan a long time?*

**SANDY:** When I was a kid in the third and fourth grades I was reading comic books all the time — especially the FANTASTIC FOUR and the **Ditko**s. There were maybe about three or four titles which made my childhood. They had more impact than TV or movies. And then I dropped it because everyone was telling me that I was getting too old for comic books, and I was stupid enough to listen to them. It wasn't until I was about 16 or 17 that I had a revelation and thought, "If I want to buy comic books I will, and if people make fun of me, the hell with it."

**STEVE:** *As far as comics artists, who are your influences?*

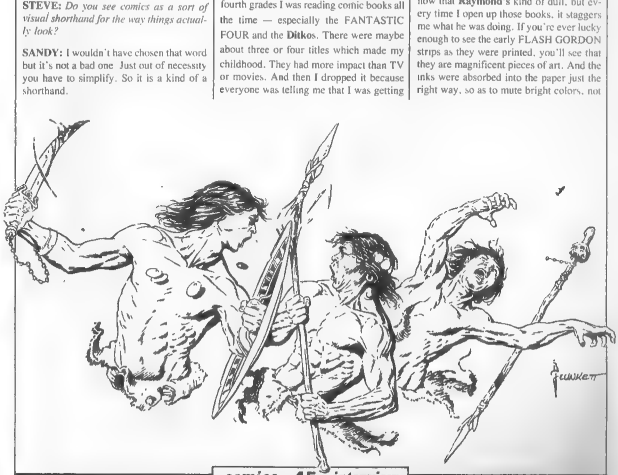
**SANDY:** My main comics influence is the early Williamson, his EC work. You can see the work which he did on his own, and which wasn't too well inked, but there was just never anyone in comic books as far as I can tell, who was as in love with drawing, so sensitive to the beauty of drapery, or of figures ...

**STEVE:** *Or swirling smoke from an ashtray.*

**SANDY:** He was one of the most romantic artists to ever work in comics, and I don't think he's really been equalled.

**STEVE:** *What about stip artists like Foster and Raymond?*

**SANDY:** The two Nostalgia Press FLASH GORDON books that they reprinted in black and white are amazing. A lot of people say now that **Raymond's** kind of dull, but every time I open up those books, it staggers me what he was doing. If you're ever lucky enough to see the early FLASH GORDON strips as they were printed, you'll see that they are magnificent pieces of art. And the inks were absorbed into the paper just the right way, so as to mute bright colors, not



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# "A hero standing on one leg looks like a sissy."

t. 1984 MCG

like on the glossy kind of paper they use on reprints.

**STEVE:** *How did you like the way that Craig Russell interpreted your pencils on the MARVEL FANFARE story?*

**SANDY:** I couldn't have asked for better. There was kind of a sketchy quality to the inking which I don't think I would have put in, but it worked. There are subtleties he captured in the drawing that other, more formularized inkers would have missed

**STEVE:** *I thought that the anatomy on the FANFARE story was just top notch. Did you work with live models?*

**SANDY:** There's one or two positions which I had a friend model for me. I find, though, that there's such a gulf between what a real figure looks like, and what a comic-book figure is, that you have to be real careful about drawing from life.

**STEVE:** *A lot of comic-book artists draw the figure as if the muscles are on the outside of the skin.*

**SANDY:** Yeah, right. You have to understand that traditionally super-heroes don't have much relationship to real human anatomy. If you were to draw, let's say, BATMAN as a real human being, he wouldn't look like a super-hero anymore. You have to choose heroic positions for them. **Alan Weiss** pointed out to me that if you simply have a hero standing with his weight on one leg, he looks like a sissy to an editor, so you can't use it. I did a DEFENDERS cover where the Vision was looking a little too slim for a super-hero, so I had to change it, and it looks like bad anatomy, but it had to be done

**STEVE:** *I thought you did a pretty good SPIDER-MAN. How did you feel about drawing the character?*

**SANDY:** I thanked **Al Milgrom** very much for giving me a little trouble in the beginning, because he really should have. I started off doing it too much like a normal figure, so one day he started to walk around the office knock-kneed, saying "This is how you have to draw him when he's in his suit." So I went back and looked at **Ditko**'s SPIDER-MAN as Al had recommended.

**STEVE:** *To get those funky postures that Ditko used?*

**SANDY:** Right. You can either copy **Ditko** direct, or try to get into the swing of it, and I don't think I ever really did get into the swing of it, no pun intended.

**STEVE:** *When I interviewed Russell a while back, he told me that inking your work was just sheer joy.*

**SANDY:** Oh, I'm so happy to hear that!

**A panel from the SPIDER-MAN story in MARVEL FANFARE #6. Art by Sandy Plunkett and Craig Russell.**

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# "I really and truly love comics."

**STEVE:** *He said it was torture because of all the fineline work in your stuff, but at the same time, he said it was a real pleasure to work with somebody who was so good. The length of time it took you to draw that story is legend, now. How long did it actually take?*

**SANDY:** Well, I wasn't sitting down and working straight through it week after week. I would pick it up then, and put it off to do other things which would pay the bills. Some of the pages took a week, some took longer. There are panels which I did over three or four times until I got it right.

**STEVE:** *How do you work up a page? Do you do thumbnails first?*

**SANDY:** I've worked every way I know, and I haven't found one which I'm totally happy with. Some of my best pieces are done spontaneously, without any preparation. Sometimes I have to do version after version — I'll do thumbnails and then I'll do full size on layouts, and then I might throw everything away and put down something totally different on the board. So, I have no formulated way of doing it. I just do whatever happens to work

**STEVE:** *Do you feel that you're still in the process of learning how to draw comics?*

**SANDY:** Without a doubt. This is another reason the MARVEL FANFARE story took me so long. I had worked out a plot with **Mike Barr** that was kind of rushed through the editing stage because **Al Milgrom** knew I wanted the job right away. I had worked primarily from full scripts and I had to do an awful lot of learning about pacing and storytelling. And so, I feel like I'm just beginning in that regard.

**STEVE:** *What are you doing for EPIC?*

**SANDY:** One of the worst jobs I've ever done, in terms of my frustration level. It's the story of the death of **Robert E. Howard. Roy Thomas** wrote a letter to **Paul Gulacy** in which he outlined this story very roughly. But **Paul Gulacy** wasn't available to do it. **Archie Goodwin** asked me if I'd be interested, and I said sure. This was about a year and a half ago.

**STEVE:** *Why is it taking you so long?*

**SANDY:** It's probably going be about thirteen pages. It's just that I have a great admiration for **Howard**'s writing. I wanted to do a very good job. It's EPIC, very good printing, and I totally froze up. I'm still having trouble with it.

**STEVE:** *Would you like to branch into painting?*

**SANDY:** Yes, but I don't want to leave comic books. I really and truly love comics, and I'm hoping I'll get to the point where I'll actually draw fast enough so it isn't laughable.

**A Sandy Plunkett cover for DEFENDERS #123.**

**STEVE:** *What kind of work would you like to do?*

**SANDY:** I would like to do a job in which I don't have to exaggerate the figures. One of my all time favorite stips was **Kaluta**'s "Carson of Venus" strip in DC's KORAK. **Kaluta** was drawing real people. I'd love to have a chance to do that.

**STEVE:** *You also did some black-and-white work for SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN, didn't you?*

**SANDY:** I sent Xeroxes to **Roy Thomas**, thinking he might be interested in my work, and didn't hear a word about it until several months later, when **Joe Rubinstein** called me up and said, "I liked your work in SAVAGE SWORD." Apparently Roy needed illustrations quick, and had taken the Xeroxes that I had sent them and had published them about the size of postage stamps.

**STEVE:** *Were you a little torqued that they'd published Xeroxes?*

**SANDY:** I was very pissed that I hadn't heard anything until they were actually published, but everyone at Marvel was very apologetic. It was just one of those snafus, and they paid me well and there's no bad feelings about it. Actually, when I first went

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**The first Fantagraphics Books issue, JOURNEY #15, ships in December.**

(Retailers and distributors note: Since this and the following issue have already been solicited by the previous publisher, Aardvark-Vanaheim, we will be using their draws for both these issues, which will be released with a cover price of $1.70 ($2.00 Canada) as advertised. If you have any questions, call David Olbrich at 818-706-2437 for details.

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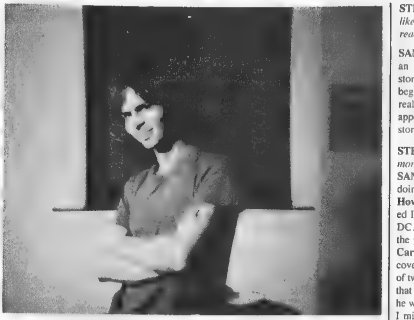
# "Horror can be a lot of fun to do."



around to Marvel. I did black-and-white illustrations for their horror books.

**STEVE:** *Do you like that kind of material?*

**SANDY:** I think horror can be a lot of fun to do. It's rarely done well, it's usually very exploitative, but I like anything with a heavy atmosphere.

**STEVE:** *Would you ever like to ink your own comics work?*

**SANDY:** Oh, definitely. I feel I should. I think it's just a matter of building up the nerve and the ability. I think that's how it should be done

**STEVE:** *One guy doing everything?*

**SANDY:** Not necessarily everything, but inking is so much a part of the drawing that you're bound to lose something unless you do it yourself.

**STEVE:** *Well, are you faster on things like illustrations?*

**SANDY:** Surprisingly enough, a full illustration — such as a full cover — can sometimes take me the same amount of time as one panel, which is very odd. So, yes, I am faster. I can almost do legitimate speed on things like single illustrations. A comic page contains six panels or so, and each *should* be done with the care of an individual illustration. And what makes it even worse is that each single panel has to relate well to all the other panels on the page. You don't have to worry about that with individual pieces. People keep saying: "Well, look, it's obvious that you should be doing illustration because you're so slow and it's not paying well." Yet it's the story continuity which is really the attractive thing for me.

**STEVE:** *Do you admire the work of someone like Frank Miller for the boldness of his storytelling?*

**SANDY:** I admire his storytelling very much. But I think you have to be careful not to have things look too crude, as far as the actual draftsmanship and rendering.

**STEVE:** *Speaking just as a fan, if I don't like the way something is drawn, I won't read it*

**SANDY:** Same with me. The trouble is that an idea has developed which says that storytelling is all that counts. I hope that's beginning to change. I think people are realizing that if the art doesn't have visual appeal, it doesn't matter how good the storytelling is.

**STEVE:** *Do you think you'll be doing any more covers for Marvel?*

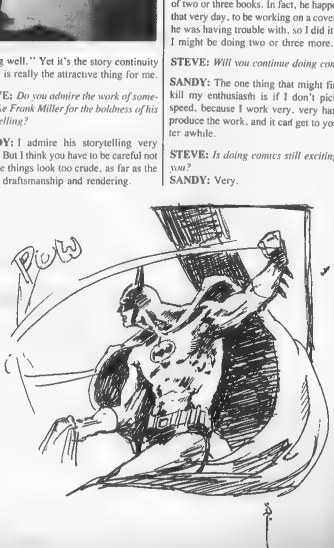
**SANDY:** Well, tentatively, I'm going to be doing a series for THE DEFENDERS. **Howie Chaykin** was the one who suggested I do covers. He suggested I go over to DC, but I don't get along really well with the people over at DC, so I mentioned to **Carl Potts** that I was interested in doing covers for him, and he gave me the choice of two or three books. In fact, he happened, that very day, to be working on a cover that he was having trouble with, so I did it, and I might be doing two or three more.

**STEVE:** *Will you continue doing comics?*

**SANDY:** The one thing that might finally kill my enthusiasm is if I don't pick up speed, because I work very, very hard to produce the work, and it can get to you after awhile.

**STEVE:** *Is doing comics still exciting for you?*

**SANDY:** Very.

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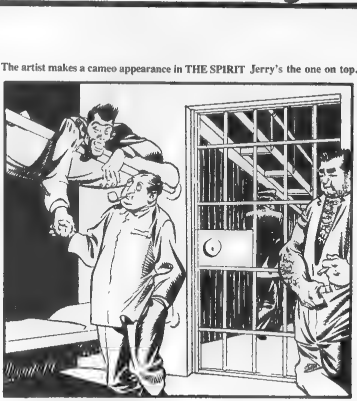
# "Will Eisner was like a god to us."

The artist makes a cameo appearance in THE SPIRIT. Jerry's the one on top.



1980 Will Eisner

# JERRY GRANDENETTI

*I'm sitting there in seventh grade, having discovered what still remains as my favorite horror story — Ray Bradbury's "Pillar of Fire." A walking dead man crawls from his grave in the 24th century to wreak havoc on a spotlessly-clear world and bring back all the superstition it thought it had expunged from its surface. "He came out of the earth, hating," runs the first line. And I'm seeing Jerry Grandenetti drawings of the story in my mind.*

*Grandenetti, to me,* was *the essence of horror back then, when I first discovered his work in the early issues of CREEPY and EERIE. His panels captured a sense of tension like no other artist before or since: look sideways and something would leap off the page at you before you knew it. His characters had two kinds of faces: mad, or half-mad (if they were supposed to be normal). It was a strange world that Grandenetti drew, hell-bent for the looney bin.*

*Later on I discovered Jerry had created a volume of art before his Warren work. He started out around 1948 as a background man for THE SPIRIT. Later, he provided Fiction House with "The Secret Files of Dr. Drew," a strip so well drawn and written you have to look twice to make sure that it wasn't by Will Eisner. He also turned out a carload of horror, crime, war, science-fiction, western and love comics for Ace, Nedor, St. John and Signal after leaving the Eisner studio.*

*But by far his longest relationship was*

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Name:** Jerry Grandenetti
**Occupation:** Artist; Art Director for the Young and Rubicam Advertising Agency
**Born:** 25 April 1925
**Training:** The Will Eisner Studio
**Credits:** THE SPECTRE, PREZ, G. I. COMBAT, EERIE, OUR ARMY AT WAR, CREEPY, VAMPIRELLA, SGT. ROCK, and many more. Drew backgrounds for Will Eisner's THE SPIRIT.
**Favorite Movie:** MANHATTAN

# "DC's war comics were so tame that I

*with DC comics, working on various books, mostly war, mystery and western, from 1952 to 1964. He was one of Bob Kanigher's mainstays in the DC war line and found time for TOMAHAWK, JOHNNY THUNDER and STRONG BOW, among other things.*

*Circa 1964, he took a three-year hiatus from the company, did his famous stint with Warren, and also worked a mite for Charlton, Gold Key, Marvel, and Tower. He returned to DC to do THE SPECTRE in the late Sixties, drew the first NIGHTMASTER and PHANTOM STRANGER, co-created "Force Three," worked extensively on the war books and DC's revived ghost titles, and turned out features like "Rosa: Master Spy," "Women at War," "Green Team" and — yes, we haven't forgotten it — the inimitable PREZ.*

*And with all this, he's an art director for Young & Rubicam, one of the country's top advertising agencies, as well.*

*Quite an auspicious casreer for a former comic-book jailbird . . .*

**Sample of art from "Dr. Drew."**

**LOU MOUGIN:** *I've seen an old SPIRIT in which a character named "Slippery Eal!" walks into a jail cell and shakes hands with a guy on the top bunk. Slippery looks a lot like Will Eisner, and I'm told that the guy on the top bunk is supposed to be you.* (Laughter.) *Is that true?*

**JERRY GRANDENETTI:** That's right! Will used some of the guys in the studio. I'm not sure if **Jules Feiffer** was in that shot, but I think I was.

**LOU:** *How was it working at the Eisner studio?*

**JERRY:** **Will Eisner** was like a god to us. I learned an awful lot from him, and I was able to apply it not only to anything I would want to do in comics, obviously, but to *anything* visual — advertising or whatever.

**LOU:** *You started out as an architectural draftsman before you were a comics artist. Weren't you hired by the Eisner studios on the strength of that?*

**JERRY:** That's what **Will Eisner** says. *(Laughter.)* The story was that he was advertising for someone with that kind of training to do architectural backgrounds in THE SPIRIT. I think it was actually a matter of pot luck — I was just around at the right time.

When I was hired, **Eisner** was pretty much inking **John Spranger's** pencils for THE SPIRIT, and adding slight embellishments of his own, and I did the backgrounds. **Eisner** gave his own very personal direction, but except for those little nuances

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DOG BOY

FANS BEST FRIEND

# always felt things were kind of staged."

1969 NPP, Inc/DC Comics, Inc.

that he put into the finishes, I would say THE SPIRIT was, at that time, about eighty percent **John Spranger.**

**LOU:** *Then you did two strips almost entirely on your own — adaptations of "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Ambrose Bierce's "The Thing."*

**JERRY:** Yeah, that was a kind of break-away from the things I was doing for **Eisner.** In fact, even at that time, I was doing a strip for Fiction House called "The Strange Files of Doctor Drew."

**LOU:** *Yeah, I've seen that — a beautiful Eisnerian strip, about the best swipe of his stuff I've ever seen, and just good art, period. Did you script those "Doctor Drew" stories yourself?*

**JERRY:** No, **Marilyn Mercer** did the basic writing on that, although she and I would toss around a few ideas.

**LOU:** *Most of your comic work from the Fifties on, has been war stories for DC. Did you base any of your work in that genre on your own war experiences?*

**JERRY:** I do have quite a few experiences from my Navy years that stand out in my mind to this day — for instance, I once saw a guy fly onto the deck of a ship and smash a tower — but most of the war books we did at DC could hardly be considered realistic, and I could never relate them to what the war really was like. Unlike EC, DC's war comics were so tame that I always felt that things were kind of staged.

**LOU:** *How did you come to work for Bob Kanigher at DC?*

**JERRY:** Actually, I started working for **Jack Schiff.** At that time everyone was groping for talent, and for some reason I was yanked over to **Kanigher's** department — regretfully, I learned later on. **Kanigher** is a very tough guy to work for. But he is a very good writer, and it was a very rewarding experience for me to work for him.

**LOU:** *Well, considering you spent twelve years there, you must have found working for him pretty agreeable, despite his toughness.*

**JERRY:** Yeah, I think we had a rapport going there for a while. It was my suggestion to Bob that we use half -tones on the covers, and Bob helped me convince DC to use that idea. I think they were the first half-tones ever used on comic-book covers.

**LOU:** *That's right. I was looking through a friend's collection recently and saw one of those covers, signed by you, and I thought, "This is really good stuff."*

**This page and next: Jerry's wash-drawing technique for DC covers.**

**JERRY:** It was an interesting development. **Sol Harrison** would take my half-toned wash drawings, and by color indications would have some color washed over them. You'd have a kind of bastardized illustration — not really a full-color illustration but effective enough. It was a departure from the general look.

**LOU:** *What was it like being a comic-book artist in the 1950s, during the Wertham scare? Did you get mothers telling you, "Mr. Grandenetti, I hear you draw those terrible things that are corrupting my child"?*

**JERRY:** I wasn't that concerned myself, although a lot of people were. The stuff we did at DC was relatively tame compared to what the other houses were publishing, such as EC's comics. Their books were a little more provocative.

**LOU:** *That's true. They did provoke people. (*Laughter.*) You broke away from DC in about 1964, for three or four years. Why was that? Was there a big rift between you and the War Department?*

**JERRY:** Not really. I started to do a lot of magazine illustrations, but then that market began to diminish, as photography took over. I did some illustrations for men's magazines that I didn't sign my name to. It was a pretty demeaning experience. But it paid off for me, because the end result is that I have this tremendous,

# MEGATON MAN JOINS KITCHEN SINK LINE-UP!

SO MUCH FOR A *HOUSE STYLE!*

# "I had fun all the time I was in comics."

diversified background. And I began to do advertising work — brochures for Avis and what-not — and that was very rewarding.

**LOU:** *You were also doing a whole bunch of work for Tower, Charlton, and some things for Marvel, such as one SUB-MARINER story that I recall —*

**JERRY:** Only one or two things for Marvel. I did THE HULK a couple of times.

**LOU:** *— and perhaps most importantly, you did some very impressive work for Warren's line of weirdies, during the Archie Goodwin era. You used a free-form layout on those Warren stories, sometimes dispensing with panel borders entirely. Your pages seemed to tremble on the verge of insanity.*

**JERRY:** I've had a lot of fun during my whole time doing comics, but I probably had the most fun working for Warren. I had *carte blanche* — I think everybody there did, in fact — so I said to myself, "This is a chance to really experiment." And I did. Many times I failed — probably most of the time — but every once in a while I would latch on to something I thought was pretty exciting. I laid it out the way I wanted, I experimented with camera angles, I put the stories together the way I thought they should be put together. I did whatever the hell I wanted to do.

**LOU:** *In 1967 you came back to work for DC, and did one of your few super-hero features, THE SPECTRE. I remember, Neal Adams saying you should have been doing that all along.*

**JERRY:** Neal was being very polite. I don't know exactly how it is today, but an awful lot of comics are done the way the hierarchy dictates. For a short time, when I went back to DC, I was given free rein. And then I had to do what they wanted me to do.

**LOU:** *It seemed to me that THE SPECTRE's problem was that they played musical chairs with the artists and writers and editors so often that it never really had a chance to catch on. It died after ten issues.*

**JERRY:** Well, it's been revived a thousand times. Or a lot of times, at any rate.

**LOU:** *In one of Michael Fleisher's SPECTRE stories in ADVENTURE COMICS, he had a trio of gangsters called the Grandenetti Brothers.* (Laughter.)

**JERRY:** I didn't know that!

**LOU:** *You did some rather unique collaborations with Joe Simon during this second period you were at DC — PREZ, "The Green Team," and "The Outsiders."*

**JERRY:** They were interesting packages, but one of the troubles with the comics industry — maybe even today — is that it's almost impossible to tell whether a new vehicle is a success after only two or three issues. It's not a fair way to judge. Although **PREZ** ran for quite a while.

**LOU:** *From the late Seventies until recently you worked quite extensively, once again, in DC's war line. Anything from that period stand out in your mind as something you're particularly proud of?*

**JERRY:** "Force Three." We did it for a good while and I guess it's not appearing any more, but I understand that sales were very, very good.

**LOU:** *I always thought your DC war books were the best things — after the EC war books — that anyone has ever done with that* genre. *Of all the comic work you've done, in your thirty-years-plus of doing comics, what stands out as the high point?*

**JERRY:** Oh, I guess my experience with **Will Eisner** was probably the best, although my early days at Warren probably was the most exciting time.

As I said, I've had fun all the time I worked in comics.

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# "Marvel was the teeniest little office."

**Flo posing in Herb Trimpe's vintage 1939 bi-plane.**

# FABULOUS FLO STEINBERG

*I met Flo Steinberg while working on the Sol Brodsky biography for MARVEL AGE and during the course of her interview discovered a warm, thoughtful woman who, though she has been away from the comic-book business for many years, still keeps in contact with many of her friends. And, because Flo recalled more events about the early days of Marvel than could be included in Sol's biography, I arranged to interview her later with the express reason of finding out what the early years of Marvel were like and what she is doing now. Several short weeks later, Jim Salicrup and I were sitting in Flo's memorabilia-laden apartment discussing the subject warm to us all — the early years at Marvel...*

**JIM SALICRUP:** *I'll sit back and relax and Dwight will ask the questions...*

**DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN:** *... and Jim will provide the Howard Cosell commentary.*

**FLO STEINBERG:** You'll laugh when I say something funny, right?

**JIM:** *I'll say "laughter" and they'll write that in the magazine. Then people will really think we were laughing.*

**DWIGHT:** *Okay! We are in the memento-strewn apartment of Flo Steinberg with her illustrations from Trina Robbins, photos of John Verpoorten, drawings by Herb Trimpe...*

**JIM:** *This is the part you're supposed to write in the introduction, Dwight!*

**DWIGHT:** *I don't like writing that section — I prefer to just talk about it. By the way, Flo, Jack Abel says "Hi."*

**FLO:** Oh, thank you!

**DWIGHT:** *Flo, we'd like to start the interview with when and how you were hired by Marvel.*

**FLO:** Well, it was March of '63. I had just come to New York from Boston where I was born and raised and schooled. I had come to New York City and moved into one of the "Y's" and I started job hunting. It was all through agencies in those days. I went on different interviews, stuff like that, in my traditional interview outfit of a black dress and pearls and gloves. It was a different time, back then. *(Laughter.)* One was a

FLO STEINBERG

# "Stan Lee and I used to argue over

secretarial assistant at this magazine company. And I went up and talked to this man, **Stan Lee**. And the interview was in this teeny little cubbyhole of an office. Well, let's see, the offices were always on Madison Avenue. This might have been the farthest one uptown . . . 650, no — 625 Madison Avenue — after 60th Street, anyway. And the whole Magazine Management company was in one big floor with partitions set up. And Marvel Comics was the teeniest little office on the floor. There was Stan and his desk, then another small desk. At that time, as I remember, it was mostly bi-monthly comics. The monster comics like what **Steve Ditko** and **Jack Kirby** used to do. And the girls' comics like MILLIE THE MODEL and PATSY WALKER. The FANTASTIC FOUR was probably starting then. But, the atmosphere was really low key.

**DWIGHT:** *Stan was low key?*

**FLO:** Oh, no! Stan always had this high energy level. It's just that the office was very small. There was just a small amount of comics to get out. And Stan wrote them all. And as I remember **Steve Ditko**, **Jack Kirby** or **Don Heck** or **Dick Ayers** — a small group — drew them. **Sol Brodsky** would come in to do production work.

**DWIGHT:** *So everybody except you and Stan were freelancing — there was no production staff.*

**FLO:** Yes, that's right, it was just the two of us. There really wasn't much work in my job. There wasn't much fan mail coming in at the time. The most fan mail that came in was for the girls' books — the little outfits pages that appeared in the comics would feature clothing designs suggested by the readers And I wrote all the little captions for those. **Stan Goldberg** or **Al Hartley** would draw the actual designs and then we'd have these letters from people who sent designs. And if someone sent in a design for a dress, we'd match it with the drawing of a dress, a bathing suit suggestion with a bathing suit drawing, etc. And then I'd write the caption saying "darling dress by--" and put that person's name in. So the kids got their names in the comic. The drawings bore no relation to the designs the kids sent in, of course

**Trina Robbins** is doing a teenage book now for Marvel. It's not on schedule yet, from what I hear, but it'll have fashion pages and stuff like that in it. In fact, I think her character's aunt will be Millie the Model.

As for how the comics were produced back then, Stan would write the synopsis and the artist would go home and draw the story. He'd bring the art into the office and then Stan would write the final story. **Artie Simek** and **Sam Rosen** were the only letterers. And they'd come in to pick up and drop off work. But it was not that hectic. There'd always be time to sit around and chat. Artie, he's dead now, but he used to play the spoons and the harmonica. Sam never came in.

His brother brother Joe would always be the one picking up and delivering the work. **Stan Goldberg** would come in for the coloring. And . . . well, I don't remember being very busy in the very beginning. Stan and I used to argue over who would address the envelopes that would go over to the Comics Code.

The people over at Magazine Management would make fun of us. It was a big organization back then. The only time the different departments ever really came together was when we heard that **President Kennedy** had been killed. Everybody sort of dropped everything and came together to listen to the radio reports.

I AM THE WATCHER, AND IT IS MY TASK TO OBSERVE THE REALMS OF THE ALTERNATE UNIVERSES.
THIS CONTEXT EMBODIES AN ENDLESS SUCCESSION OF DUPLICATE EARTHS, EARTHS THAT ARE ONE ANOTHER AT CRITICAL POINTS.
IN THIS PARTICULAR REALITY, THE FANTASTIC FOUR WAS NOT FORMED. IS REED RICHARDS, BEN GRIMM, JOHNNY AND SUE STORM.
LISTEN, SOL! FLAMES ON 'E NO! I HAD TO USE DOPE ON HIM! FRIENDS!
SORRY, AL...
THE LAST TIME HE WAS HERE, I GOT SUN-BURNED IN EVERY SINGLE AREA!
GONE
WHERE
AGAIN!
NO, AL... I'M NOT GOING TO TELL YOU BEFORE I KNOW!
INSTEAD, MISTER FANTASTIC IS ACTUALLY EDITOR STAN LEE, WHO STILL OCCUPIES THE ROOM AT THE TOP IN THE TERRIFIC NEW FACTORY KNOWN AS MARVEL COMICS...
SOL BRODSKY IS ACTUALLY... MAKAZI, IS SECRETLY THE HUMAN TORCH!

**The original Marvel Bullpen, in a world they never made — as envisioned by writer/artist Jack Kirby in the pages of WHAT IF? #11**

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# who would address the envelopes."

I'D BE CAREFUL, BOYD! THAT CAVE GUY IS TERRIBLY STRONG.
THIS IS LIFE IN THE FUTURE
LIFE IS A BLUR OF FRANTIC PENCIL-PUSHING IN ANTICIPATION OF THE SUDDEN CHANGE WHEN BILL TRANSFORM--!! --THE THING!
"AS FOR JACK KIRBY, THE LIVING LEGEND..."
OOPS! I'VE BEEN AT THE WRONG TRIP ISLAND OF DOCTOR MURPHY
"AND THIS REALITY'S INVISIBLE GIRL IS ACTUALLY MARVEL COMICS SECRETARY FLO STEINBERG...BETTER KNOWN UNDER HER DOMINANT NAME "FABULOUS FLO."
HOW BIG SUCH A FANTASTIC FOUR COME TO BE? WATCH AND ALL SHALL BE REVEALED.

**This strange story — co-starring Flo with Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Sol Brodsky as Marvel's Fantastic Four — came as a delightful surprise!**

Then we moved to another building. And that was when things really started happening. SPIDER-MAN came along . . . and all of a sudden fan mail started coming in — which it never really had before. We didn't have letters pages in the early comics. It was welcome, but the mail was really unexpected. We didn't know what to do with all of it. And people started coming up to the office. And I would have to go out and see what they wanted. And little kids would try to run by me and get into the office. They were so determined. And I would have to trip them — you really had to trip some of them to stop them from getting into the office. I remember New York people like **Marv Wolfman** and **Len Wein** coming up as fans to the office. But we never let anyone into the office. An office was an office. Everyone thought that it was nice that the kids were coming up, but at the same time, these visits didn't have anything to do with what we were doing — which was producing the comics. This was a business, y'know.

**JIM:** *What was the attitude that Stan and the artists had toward their work? Did they regard it as "just a job" or . . .*

**FLO:** Oh, everyone loved the work, Jim. I mean, Stan would just sit there, typing out stories. And when the artists came in, they'd discuss the plots and act them out. Stan would jump on the desk and be Thor or somebody. And they'd run around the office. Everyone was pleased with what they were doing. And it was important — if I repeat myself, I'm sorry — but everyone felt it was important to get the job done. And get it done on time. It was not an ego-centered thing, it was more like you were a craftsman.

**JIM:** *Well, now people talk about creators' rights. Was there any of that back then when they were creating characters? Or did they look at that as being part of their job?*

**FLO:** Yeah, yeah it was just part of the job. Stan or Jack or whomever thought the character up would discuss him. It was for the company. And the creators were paid for their work.

**JIM:** *They were pretty happy about that?*

**FLO:** People were more interested in raises rather than special bonus things.

**JIM:** *Did they ask for their artwork back?*

**FLO:** No. We used to throw it out. It would pile up, you know, and when the file got too full, we'd just take the oldest art and throw it out. We're talking about from 1963 to at least 1966.

**DWIGHT:** *So that's the first issues of THE FANTASTIC FOUR?*

**FLO:** Well, I would think so. I read all these things in the trade papers about how all this stuff is in a warehouse or all this stuff is on sale at conventions. I don't remember specifically, but back then it was like "old wood" to us. The art was just thrown into a pile. And I truly don't remember when they started that warehousing business. But before that, it just never dawned on anybody that the stuff was worth saving. Even the comic books — keeping back issues in the office — it was just not relevant back then.

**JIM:** *Well, on the art, I think they sent it all out to a warehouse at one point and they recently started returning it.*

**FLO:** The real old stuff, too? That's great! I'm glad it all didn't get thrown out, because when I was there, it would get in the way. And whenever we moved, we threw the stuff away.

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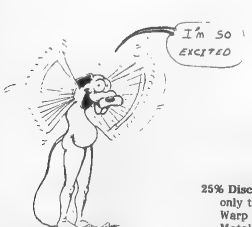


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# "Mario Puzo and others were making jokes."

**DWIGHT:** *Speaking of the office, you said the place was quite small.*

**FLO:** Well, at the very first place we were at, there was nothing to speak of. There was a drawing table where someone could make corrections. But at the second place we moved, 625 Madison, it was bigger, and Sol and I shared our first office there. I had a desk, and Sol had a desk and there were drawing boards — this was when we were really moving up! And Stan had his own office. He was quite excited, he even had a rug! That was a first! *(Laughter.)*

*Oh, when* **Wally Wood** would come up to the office — he was doing DAREDEVIL — he was a chainsmoker. And even though there were ashtrays in Stan's office, he'd always drop ashes on Stan's carpet. And that would drive Stan bananas. So when Woody would go into Stan's office, I would walk with him and then very deftly take away his cigarette at the last minute. And it worked a few times. But as soon as he was in Stan's office, he'd light up another one.

Then there was another room. And I'm not sure the order in which they came on staff, but there was **Morrie Kuramoto**, **Marie Severin**, **John Verpoorten**, and then **Roy Thomas**.

**DWIGHT:** *That was about 1965-66?*

**FLO:** Yes . . . so he would have been in that room, too. Across the hall. Jim, do you remember?

**JIM:** *I started work for Marvel when they were at 635 Madison Avenue, which was when they moved away from Magazine Management.*

**FLO:** Yeah, okay. So anyway, we were the first division, then you'd move along the hall and you'd enter the men's magazines area, the crossword puzzles and millions of other things. And they would always look at us sort of funny. Stan always told me that the other editors never quite knew what to say to him. They didn't really know what we were doing. As I mentioned in the other interview, some of the writers from Magazine Management were **Mario Puzo** and **Bruce Jay Freidman** and a few other writers who got really famous later. They were always making jokes about us. They'd come in and giggle . . . I'm getting off the track.

Anyway, in that office was when the super-hero thing really got off the ground. Roy came. I can't remember when exactly the others came in, but I remember Stan had other writers like **Steve Skeates** and **Denny O'Neil** come in.

Denny came from Missouri. And the day he landed in New York, to come up and visit, it happened to be Yom Kippur. And the whole town was closed down! Marvel was closed, everybody was closed. Businesses really closed then. And he couldn't get ahold of anybody! He didn't know what was going on!

**DWIGHT:** *Who started up the Merry Marvel Marching Society?*

**FLO:** Oh! Well, with all the letters coming in, kids would write and ask us why we didn't have a fan club. And we would ask each other, "Who would spend money to be in a comic-book fan club?" And every-

**A typical day at the office, Marvel-style — from WHAT IF? #11.**

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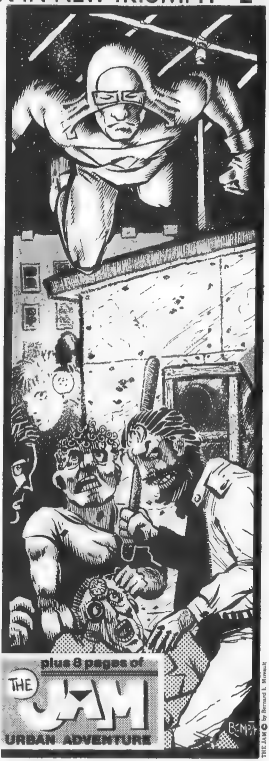
# COMING FROM MATRIX IN NEW TRIUMPH #2

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# "People didn't think they were the stars."

one would say that he didn't have time to get involved setting one up. Finally, we decided to try it. And Stan wrote a little script for a record that we would make for the membership kit. And we all went to a real recording studio to do the record. And everyone was very nervous. Have you heard it?

**DWIGHT:** *I've heard about it, but I haven't listened to it. I'd like to, though!*

**FLO:** Okay, I've got a copy here — we'll listen to it after we're done with the interview. It was cute, y'know. Everyone had their little piece to say. I remember **Steve Ditko** didn't want to be on it, and I think Marie or Sol did up the artwork for it and the membership button. And we decided to sell the membership kit for a buck. It'd cover expenses, that's all. Well, after the first ad went out, we got these huge bags of mail — the response was so out of line with what everyone expected! And everyone kept saying that they wouldn't open up the mail! And it wasn't just kids wanting to join the MMMS, there were college students and adults sending in their dollars, too! This was really new for us! People who could write — and spell! Marvel wound up having fan clubs in colleges. There was one in Stanford, I remember, that was very active. They would send us their newsletters, letting us know what they were doing. No one could figure it out — why this was happening. When Dr. Strange started up we got all these letters saying, "Boy! You guys must be into drugs! These stories are so far-out! And in the Village — wow!" And the people at Marvel then were all just the straightest people you could imagine! We really didn't know what anyone was talking about in these letters. And the first reaction about these letters about Dr. Strange and drugs, was "Oh, drugs! Maybe we should change the stories!" We really couldn't figure out how those people were getting such ideas. And also at this time the cowboy comics were still going on and SGT. FURY, which I was quite fond of.

**JIM:** *When did you find yourself paying more attention to the comics?*

**FLO:** Well, I always loved them. I was just shocked that there were so many people out there who wanted to be a part of the whole thing. Rather than just buy the comics, read them and enjoy them, they wanted to be actively involved with this... Marvelness.

**DWIGHT:** *Did you see the Bullpen's attitude start to change, as the fan response grew?*

**FLO:** Everyone got a kick out of it. But at that time the fans did not have that much influence about what actually went into the story. It was always interesting to hear what they said, but decisions were not made based on fan interest. It was business judgements, because if a comic book was not selling and even though all the fans loved it, **Martin Goodman**, the publisher, would cancel it.

People didn't take themselves so seriously — they didn't think that they were the stars. They did their work, and if the work was received well, that was very gratifying. But they didn't start thinking that they were the artwork — you know what I mean? It was not a star system then. I don't know if this was perhaps because people were older then.

**JIM:** *Well, I think that part of it was started by Stan, himself.*

**FLO:** When he started doing the credits. That was a real first in comics.

**DWIGHT:** *And Stan, Jack and Steve were the people who really got Marvel going.*

**FLO:** Absolutely.

**JIM:** *When did Stan start calling you "Fabulous Flo"?*

**FLO:** Oh! Stan started making up names for everybody. This must have been in the mid-60s. In one of the annuals, he put in pictures of everyone in the office at the time, and Stan started giving everyone names. Everyone enjoyed it. Stan was giving credit to people who were relative unknowns — especially people like letterers and colorists.

**"Me at Marvel in December 1964...a bit of cheesecake...I was so embarrassed to have my slip showing! Nylons and heels were deriguеur at the time."**

**JIM:** *Actually, it was Roy, when he became editor-in-chief, who first gave the colorists credit listings.*

**FLO:** Yes, Roy was also very good about giving people credit. It was a wonderful thing giving credit to the people who worked on the stories. And maybe that's how it all evolved with the person becoming the star, rather than the character. I'm not against it, it's just that it was different.

**JIM:** *You mentioned that people from Magazine Management came by and didn't know what to think of Marvel. What did you think of working for the comic—book division?*

**FLO:** I looked at them as magazines — hey! I'm in the magazine business! And it was my first job. And at that time, even with a degree or anything, you were lucky to make $60 a week starting. That was just the way things were. And Stan offered me $65, which was a big incentive to sign on! And I took the job and we got along very well

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# "Bill Everett had the best excuses."

I got along well with the people. I enjoyed the production of it, seeing it starting. Seeing it come together. Sending stuff to the Comics Code. Do they still send stuff there? Getting it back. I enjoyed the traffic of it, which is what I've done in all my jobs. And I enjoyed mostly shipping the completed issue to the printer! *(Laughter.)* Getting it out on time was always a great feeling.

Then more and more people were starting to come to the office, and more and more mail was flooding in and it was decided that I should spend more time on the mail. And we didn't have public relations people or anything like that back then. If someone came, you'd go out and greet him. If a letter came, you answered it. And then there were too many letters to personally answer, so we did the little postcards. Then later the no-prizes. But we would get some nasty letters, too. Once we got this letter from Texas to Sgt. Fury. It was this letter saying, "Well, if you people are anti-Nazi, you must be pro-Commie, New York egghead liberals or something! And I'm coming to kill you all!" Everybody panicked. We called the FBI and an agent came down. And he gingerly held the letter and he asked us if anyone had handled the letter. And we said, "Yeah, about fifty people." And he calmed us down — he was very nice. Our tax dollars were at work here! *(Laughter.)* After that, nobody wanted to go out when someone came to visit. Especially if it was an adult. Everyone would try and leave early.

On the MMMS, on the weekends we would come in and open up the mail. And we'd have these piles of dollar bills — not even checks! It was amazing! There were little fan clubs all over the nation. And when they were in the city they would come up to visit. They would want to see something, but up until the time I left, all that those people saw was the reception room. People didn't want strangers walking around in the office stopping the production of the comics.

**DWIGHT:** *What was the atmosphere in the bullpen like?*

**FLO:** Well, there were always a lot of practical jokes, but there was nothing like what they did back in the Fifties. Then they would actually give each other hotfoots, or drop real banana skins. The stories were great to hear. Some of them were really big practical jokes with buckets of water! As for what happened when I was at Marvel, well Marie was always doing her caricatures.

**DWIGHT:** *How about your working relationship with Sol?*

**FLO:** Sol always had a good sense of humor. We always got along really well and it was fun when a job wasn't in. It was a problem! And our job was to figure out how to get the job done! And it was sort of exciting — here was a problem to be solved! One way or another we would to it — constant phone calls, and nagging people. I was very good at whining. People were very nice and responsive. If you asked them nicely they would do it. And if they didn't get their work in, there was always a reason. **Bill Everettt** had the best excuses. He'd come in and say that his hamster had eaten all the pages. *(Laughter.)* There was always a lot of work accidentally left on the subway. Always — that was a big one. Or some kid spilled their food on it. There was always a real reason why the work wasn't in. And you never saw the remnants of these pages — they just disappeared. And there was never stuff in inventory. There was never an inventory story available. Things were done right up to the minute of it going out. So these stories had to get in!

As for the art, the artists felt that their reputations rested on them meeting the deadline. You respected a person more if he made the deadline. It was part of being a professional.

**DWIGHT:** *There have been many stories told recently of how Stan and Jack got along during those early days. What did you see of their working relationship?*

**FLO:** I did not see what came out later. The hostility. I did not see them like that. I saw them working very closely and creatively together on all this great stuff, the Hulk, FF and Thor. I don't know who actually created what — I wasn't privy to that. I always assumed it was a collaboration.

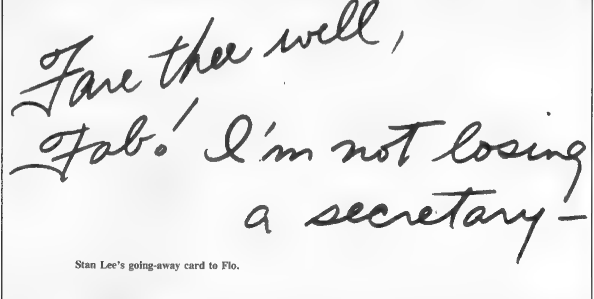
**JIM:** *I'm sure a lot of people are curious to know what happened to you after Marvel.*

**FLO:** Oh, thank you. I left Marvel in 1968. I don't remember exactly why, it was probably because I couldn't get a $5 raise. This

**"Vultures: Everyone pushing in to get copies of the new Marvels, which I first had to count and package." Caricature by Marie Severin.**

Art: Marie Severin

# "I made lifetime friendships with those




**Stan Lee's going-away card to Flo.**

was Magazine Management, not Stan — they didn't believe in giving raises to people in certain jobs because they could be so easily replaced. So after thinking about it for about two years, I decided to leave for my own good. And I got a bunch of wonderful letters from fans who wrote in when they heard I was leaving. They were really touching. And I still came back and did freelance work when I was looking for another job. Another thing about Marvel when I was working for them — it was my first job in the city and I've made my lifetime friends with some of the people from there, even though I've gone on to other things. My strongest friendships are with those people I met at or through Marvel. They're just wonderful people. My friends today are still comics people. And I like comics. That's my interest, even though I work at ARTS MAGAZINE, now.

After I left Marvel, I felt I had to get out of comics completely for a while and find a profession because "singing and dancing" at Marvel was not very marketable. So out came the interview suit and I made the rounds. I was fortunate to get a job with this trade place — the American Petroleum Institute. It put out technical manuals. A very fine woman, **Bonnie Higgins**, taught me everything. Everything about editing, about trade stuff, technical stuff. I stayed there for two and a half years and did editing. We did lots of volumes for the refining division, and truck driver manuals and how to clean your oil tanks, pamphlets on how to deliver speeches. It was very straight-laced. The hours were from nine-to-five. And we worked with very fancy printers. I really learned the printing business there. Then, API was moving to Washington. They're a lobby organization, so they wanted to be closer to the politicians. They asked me to come with them, but I didn't feel like relocating.

Also, around this time, I was meeting people who were involved with underground comics in New York.

**JIM:** *Who was that?*

**FLO:** Oh, **Trina Robbins, Kim Deitch, Michelle** and **Roger Brand** — and they were all living on 9th Street. They were the first of what I thought were the hippies. It was wonderful meeting them. They befriended me. They knew me from Marvel. Also at this time **Wally Wood** was putting out WITZEND. And Roger was helping him with that. I was helping on some of the production. I came to all this counterculture rather late, I felt. And, as someone being exposed to it late does, I super-embraced it. And then it broke my heart because all those people started moving to California. That's where undergrounds were really happening. So off they went. I went out and visited them once. And San Francisco just seemed to be like Shangri-La. This was in 1967-68 and when API moved to Washington, I decided to move to California. I left in 1970. And everybody at Marvel gave me a big party. I got wonderful gifts. And I moved out to San Francisco. But then, after a few months, I discovered that the life there just wasn't for me. I worked for a while at **Gary Arlington**'s comic book store for a dollar an hour and all the comics I wanted. *(Laughter.)* I met **Artie Spiegelman**, who is still a friend. And **Justin Green**. And Michelle and Trina were there. **Willy Murphy**, this wonderful cartoonist who unfortunately died. His stuff was just so great! All these people would come to the comic-book store. Gary was an interesting person. He always thought he was the West Coast incarnation of **Bill Gaines**. Why not? Gary was a big EC fan, as were most of the underground writers and artists. So I stayed in San Francisco for a year because I was too embarrassed to come back. People had given me all these great going away gifts, you know? *(Laughter.)* I finally came back and stayed in Boston with my family a bit. Then I went down to New York. And it's hard reestablishing youself after you've been away for awhile. You have to have an apartment and a job. **Linda Fite** and **Herb Trimpe** were really good to me. Herb had a studio in the upper 80s that he wasn't using, so I stayed there and went job hunting. I started at the place I knew best, but Marvel wasn't hiring, DC wasn't hiring. I went to Harvey Comics and had an interview with **Leon Harvey** — a strange fellow. I went to **Jim Warren**, and he said he could use somebody, so he hired me. I was there for about three years, doing the mail order stuff for Captain Company.

**JIM:** *What was Jim Warren like?*

**FLO:** Oh! Well . . . erratic. He was always up front. He never said it was easy working for him. But he was always straight about it. And my job was to select books with monster-type products and order them, write the little ads and handle the customer complaints. And hopefully, the stuff I bought would sell. If they sold, everything was fine.

# people I met at or through Marvel."

If they didn't . . . it wasn't. And he'd call me into his office. **Jim Warren** at times could be very demanding. It was always a one person business — it was his baby, and he didn't have to answer to anybody else. He was very helpful to me when I first thought about doing my own underground comic, BIG APPLE COMIX. There was all this stuff coming out of California, and **Denis Kitchen**'s stuff, but nothing from New York.

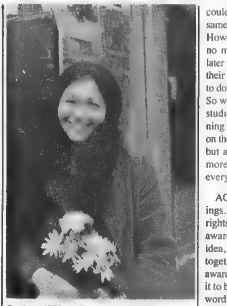
**JIM:** *When did you decide to do BIG APPLE?*

**FLO:** This was — I thought about it when I first came back from California — a big project that *I* could do, you know? I wanted to make it about New York. Uh, do you guys have copies?

**DWIGHT:** *Yes.*

**JIM:** *I used to , but when I was unpacking my collection, I couldn't find it.*

**FLO:** I'll give you one! *(Laughter.)* Things disappear, I know how that can happen. It was very important to me. And I mentioned it to friends, because I knew that the only way I would actually do the magazine was if I started talking to my friends about it. So I started asking people I was friends with if they would like to do a piece for it, or if they knew someone who would be interested. It just had to be about New York City. And I told them that I couldn't pay very much. I realized that a lot of people did it as a personal favor. But I was not above accepting it. **Wally Wood** was very cooperative. By this time **Larry Hama** had come out of the service and he was back in comics, so he and **Ralph Reese** did that one thing with **Neal Adams**. Of course, since they were doing it for so little money, I couldn't really pressure them. But at the same time I wanted to get the magazine out However, Neal was always late. You know, no matter what he promises, he's always later delivering it. Larry and Ralph had done their part, and I was waiting forever for Neal to do his. Also at this time there was ACBA. So we would meet up at Continuity, Neal's studio at 48th Street. So I'd always be running in and trying to see if he was working on the story for me. I didn't want to be rude. but as the days went by I'd get more and more anxious and I'd start to whine and everything. *(Laughter )*



**Spring, 1972, in front of Gary Arlington's comics shop in San Francisco.**

ACBA started with such great, good feelings. It's too bad it didn't work out. Artists rights, lectures, and the most popular thing, awards banquets! I thought that was a nice idea, once a year everyone would get together and dress up nice and hand out awards. But it turned out that nobody wanted it to be a union. Everyone was afraid of the word "strike." Which, of course, was what it would have ultimately lead to if they ran into serious problems with the publishers. The reason that helped ACBA fail, I think, was that the older fellows remembered the hard times they had in the Fifties. And everyone knew that the publishers could always go to reprinting material. ACBA never became a strong force. It was more Neal than anything else in that respect. I don't know how it came about that the artwork

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# "I don't remember Fellini so much..."

1975 Flo Steinberg & Big Apple Prods

started being returned, and the reprint rights started.

**JIM:** *It was a lot of things.*

**FLO:** You think so?

**JIM:** *Yeah.*

**FLO:** But it wasn't anyone threatening anybody? Was it?

**JIM:** *No, no, there wasn't the threat of forming a union or striking. It was just people — it was more an educational process. The more people talked about it, the more it made sense. I think that whenever it's explained to people that there are good logical reasons for an action, they'll do it. So the changes slowly evolved for a variety of reasons.*

**FLO:** That's good. One thing that I thought was good about ACBA was that it brought people together — it got them out of their homes and studios. The social part of it, I felt, was really valuable. I think it gave everyone more a sense of community.

**JIM:** *Well, what finally dissolved ACBA was that people wanted so many different things from it. Some wanted a union, some wanted a chance to meet their friends, etc. And ACBA couldn't be all things to all people. And, of course, no one wanted to put in the time to make the organization work. So eventually ACBA fell apart.*

**FLO:** Yeah, that was too bad

**JIM:** *When I was a member, meetings were at the Society of Illustrators Club. And it eventually became a place for people to argue with each other.*

**FLO:** Yeah, I remember a few hostile and grumpy people in the group. They were always getting up and yelling and screaming. And I thought it was so horrendous.

**DWIGHT:** *What was your reaction when you saw the WHAT IF...? issue featuring you as one of the Fantastic Four? Did you know about it beforehand?*

**FLO:** No, I didn't! And when I saw it I thought it was fantastic! It was a very gracious thing to do, I thought.

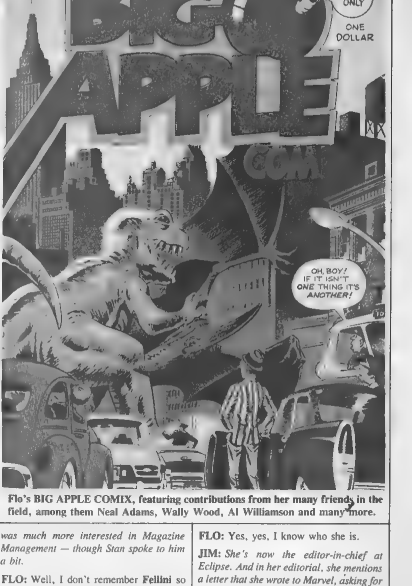
**JIM:** *Also, recently you were mentioned in two places. One was in SWANK magazine's thirtieth anniversary issue. Chip Goodman — Martin Goodman's son — is the publisher.*

**FLO:** No kidding! What did it say?

**JIM:** *Bruce Jay Freidman's son did interviews with Mario Puzo, his father and others. The article mentioned the time Fellini came to the office.*

**FLO:** Oh right! He came to the office and **Alain Resnais** — they were big comic fans.

**JIM:** *I can't remember who tells the story in that, but they say when Fellini came he was much more interested in Magazine Management — though Stan spoke to him a bit.*




**Flo's BIG APPLE COMIX, featuring contributions from her many friends in the field, among them Neal Adams, Wally Wood, Al Williamson and many more.**

**FLO:** Well, I don't remember **Fellini** so much, but when **Alain Resnais** came up he was just another guy. *(Laughter.)* By this time we were interested in people who could help publicize the comics. I think the WALL STREET JOURNAL was the first publication to do an article on the phenomenon of comics — Marvel. And when Alain came up, we really weren't that sophisticated, you know. He and Stan talked for awhile. Alain must have had a translator with him, because Stan doesn't speak word one of French. Stan gave him sourballs like he gave everyone.

**JIM:** *The other place where you were mentioned — do you remember Cat Yronwode?*

**FLO:** Yes, yes, I know who she is.

**JIM:** *She's now the editor-in-chief at Eclipse. And in her editorial, she mentions a letter that she wrote to Marvel, asking for any sort of job, even sweeping the floors — just so she could be at Marvel. And you responded telling her to go to college first, and then come back and get a better job. And Cat went on to thank you for your advice, even though she didn't follow it.*

**FLO:** She and Trina have written this book on women cartoonists that go back to the 1800s. Trina did a lot of research, going to all sorts of nursing homes. It still hasn't come out yet. I read some sample chapters and it was wonderful. I hope that it will be published soon. It is a really good historical book dealing with newspapers and all

# PETER HSU'S
# QUADRANT

#3

* JAN. 1985 *

# "Fine art is also a business. Each season there is a new thing. Right?"

**JIM:** *What happened with BIG APPLE?*
**FLO:** Oh, right, we got off the track a little there. I finally got the piece from Neal. And **Marie Severin** and **Stu Schwartzberg** and Herb and I started getting the thing ready for the printer.
**JIM:** *What made you decide to become a publisher?*
**FLO:** I'm not an artist or a writer. And I was so impressed with the spirit in San Francisco — it really was so alive out there. I wanted to do something that was my own contribution to this. At that time, it worked. I could ask these people to contribute and they had the time to do it. BIG APPLE took about two years to finally get everything together. **Archie Goodwin** did something, and **John Verpoorten** helped me a lot on the production end. Then I got it printed. And just looking at 20,000 copies of BIG APPLE was really something!

I had them all delivered to Warren because he let me use his storage space, instead of bringing them up here to my tiny apartment. That was very nice of him. And then came the part of sending out samples and filling orders and dragging all those boxes to the post office and hounding people who hadn't paid their bills. Even though it was a lot of work, I liked that part too. BIG APPLE was mine.
**JIM:** *How many copies do you have left?*
**FLO:** I just have about 50 or 100 left. After it was all over — and I did make my expenses and a little besides — **Peter Wolf** from CHERI magazine reprinted a couple of the stories, Woody and Larry's, Ralph and Neal's. And, in France L'ECHO reprinted them as well. And I gave all the money to the creators.
**JIM:** *You were their favorite publisher then.* (Laughter.)
**FLO:** Believe me, they couldn't even buy themselves a good dinner off that money. It's easy to be honest when only pennies are involved. I thought about doing a second issue. People were enthusiastic, but I knew I couldn't ask for another favor the second time around. By this time, I had also started working at ARTS MAGAZINE and that was a full time job.
**JIM:** *What do you do at ARTS MAGAZINE?*
**FLO:** Well, I'm the managing editor.
**JIM:** *Get any fan mail from the college students?*
**FLO:** No...
**JIM:** *Any fan club?* (Laughter.)
**FLO:** No, no, there I don't take the calls or go out and greet the people like I did at Marvel. It's completely changed.
**DWIGHT:** *No Merry ARTS MAGAZINE Marching Society?*
**FLO:** No, no, no. I liked going to the galleries before I started working for the magazine. But it's now turned into a business, and on my own time, I want to do something else. It's funny to think of that now. But that's what happened. **Richard Martin**, our editor, is a big UNCLE SCROOGE fan.
**DWIGHT:** *How about your duties as managing editor?*
**FLO:** I copyedit the manuscripts. And I deal a lot with the printers. I work with the typesetter and designers. Fortunately, there is a very nice staff there who will deal with the writers and the artists. Great egos abound in the art world, so you have to spend a lot of time with them when they come to the office. I spend a week at the printer looking at the bluelines, making sure that something isn't placed upside down. That often happens because that abstract stuff can be very hard to figure out. *(Laughter.)* Every issue there's something like that. The printers are also very big on flopping the illustrations.
**JIM:** *You should tell the artist to label the back of the photo — this end up.*
**FLO:** It's very important! And so many of the photos are not marked at all — not even with the name and address, so we can't even return the photos! This is my eleventh year at the magazine. And I like working with the words, with the print. I like the printing business. The office is close to my apart-

**Pulsatin' paints by Vibratin' Vincent van Gogh, for the cover of the December 1984 issue of ARTS MAGAZINE. Flo is the Managing Editor.**

# "These guys from outside took the flash

ment so I can walk to work, which is very important in New York. I don't have to dress up, also very important. It pays well and everything like that. I don't feel that I would have gotten a job like this if I hadn't left Marvel. If I had stayed there, I feel I'd still be answering the fan mail. People often asked me why I left. And I didn't leave out of dissatisfaction with the company or the people. It was just that the job I had wouldn't have led anywhere — there was no real opportunity for me. So I felt I had to leave for my career. But I still kept in touch with everyone in comics. Marie is still a friend.

**JIM:** *What is your attitude towards the art world?*

**FLO:** What I discovered from working there is that fine art is also a business. Each season there is a new "thing." Right? And the galleries are trying to stay in business. And I think sometimes the things that are in the galleries — well, it's not so much a question of whether or not you're a good artist. It's luck and timing, it seems more than anything else. We cover mostly New York art. Richard feels that New York is the center of the art world. We know that there have to be regional artists in other parts of the country who are every bit as good as New York artists, but no one knows about them because they just don't get in the press. You really do have to come here and pay your dues in many cases before you can make it.

**DWIGHT:** *I've noticed in the East Village, where I live, there are a lot of new galleries.*

**FLO:** Right. That's good, because it gets more artists on view. Exposure is part of being an artist.

**JIM:** *The Whitney Museum recently had a show about comic art. Did you see that?*

**FLO:** Yes, we covered it.

**JIM:** *The show had some work by Andy Warhol, pieces on Dick Tracy and Popeye. And Lichtenstein and others, showing how they had used the comic-book style in their work.*

# MERRY MARVEL MARCHING SOCIETY

**STAN LEE:** Okay, out there in Marvel land! Face front! This is **Stan Lee** speaking! You've probably never heard a record like this before, because no one would be nutty enough to make one with a bunch of offbeat artists, so anything is liable to happen.

**JACK KIRBY:** Hey! Who made you a disc jockey, **Lee?**

**STAN:** Well, well, Jolly **Jack Kirby**! Say a few words to the fans.

**JACK:** Okay, "A few words."

**STAN:** Look pal, I'll take care of the humor around here.

**JACK:** You? You've been using the same gags over and over for years!

**STAN:** Well, you can't accuse me of being fickle, can you? By the way, Jack, the readers have been complaining about Sue's hairdo again.

**JACK:** What am I supposed to do? Be a hairdresser? Next time I'll draw her bald-headed.

**STAN:** Boy, I'm glad we caught you when you were in a good mood!

**FLO STEINBERG:** Oh, Stan, do you have a few minutes?

**STAN:** For our fabulous Gal Friday? Sure, say hello to the fans, **Flo Steinberg**.

**FLO:** Hello, fans, it's very nice to meet you. As Marvel's Corresponding Secretary, I feel as though I know most of you from your letters. By the way, **Sol Brodsky** wants to say a few words.

**STAN:** **Sol Brodsky**? Who's he?

**FLO:** Stan! The fans know you have a bad memory by all the mistakes you make, but this is ridiculous. He's been your associate for years!

**STAN:** Really? We ought to start paying him one of these days!

**SOL BRODSKY:** I've been meaning to talk to you about that. And how come I don't get my name plastered all over the mags like you do?

**STAN:** Because I can't spell it, that's why.

**SOL:** Well, as long as you got a good reason.

**STAN:** Hey! What's all that commotion out there, Sol?

**SOL:** Why, it's shy **Steve Ditko**. He heard you were making a record and he's got mike fright! Whoops! There he goes!

**STAN:** Out the window again? You know, I'm beginning to think that he *is* Spider-Man.

**ARTI SIMEK:** You mean he isn't?

**STAN:** Who said that?

**ARTIE:** Just that lovable old letterer, me.

**FLO:** Why it's adorable **Artie Simek**. What brought you here?

**ARTIE:** The subway.

**STAN:** Oh well, ask a bonehead question, Flo.

**FLO:** Stan, **Sam Rosen** is on the phone.

**ARTIE:** Wha--another letterer? My competitor?

**STAN:** Just for fun, Artie, you talk to him!

*(Sound of a telephone receiver being picked up.)*

**ARTIE:** Hi, Sam. This is Artie. How's it going, pal?

**SAM ROSEN:** Just great, Artie. I sure admire your lettering.

**ARTIE:** I admire yours, too, Sam. I think you're tops.

**SAM:** Thanks. Well, nice talking to you.

**ARTIE:** The pleasure was all mine.

*(Artie hangs up the receiver.)*

**ARTIE:** I never could stand that guy.

**STAN:** Well, that's our Artie. Just imagine what Sam is saying about him now. Well, let's see who else we can get on this record.

**SOL:** How about **Chic Stone**?

**STAN:** Okay! Hi, Chic, how's tricks?

**CHIC:** Fine, Stan. I'm reading the latest

# of comics and, boom! It's fine art!"

**FLO:** Appropriated it, yeah. I think they really did just appropriate the comic-book image and went on to become famous. The media took them up. And those people became famous. I always resented it, personally, because it seemed to make fun of it. Here these guys from outside were just reaching in and taking some of the flash and color of comics and suddenly, boom! It's fine art! Whereas the people who were doing the stuff for years, because it was *real* comics, it was not considered art. In this country there is high art and low art. In Europe and Japan, they really don't have that sort of distinction as much as we do. The Graham Gallery often has comic art shows and Richard always asks me if I know of anyone who would like to cover them, because it is popular art that is indigenous to America. There was one on **George Harriman** of KRAZY KAT, so I called **Bobby London**, and there was another of **Chester Gould**, so I called in **Art Spiegelman**. It pays so little that they're really doing the piece for love.

**JIM:** *What do you think lies ahead for you? Will you ever get involved in comics?*

**FLO:** I wouldn't mind doing a project in comics. Undergrounds have sort of slumped. There's just not the market for them that there once was. **Denis Kitchen** is still putting out his stuff. But the last good series is **Larry Gonick**'s CARTOON HISTORY OF THE WORLD It's so good! Publishers like Rip Off Press are mostly doing anthologies now.

I would like to do another project and this time be able to pay people a bit more. I write little things down that I'd like to do, I just have to get the impetus — which can only come from yourself. I've gotten lazy the last few years. It's comfortable working at ARTS MAGAZINE. And I don't feel I have to prove anything, which is probably a big reason why BIG APPLE came out in the first place. But I would like to do a book. Maybe write my memoirs. *(Laughter.)*

© 1985 MCG

story, it's great. What a thriller!

**STAN:** Now that's what we like to hear! which one of our comics is it?

**CHIC:** Who's reading a comic? This is a novel about James Bond. I can't wait to finish it.

**STAN:** We're going to miss Chic around here

**FLO:** Oh, look who just came in, Kid Daredevil himself, **Wally Wood**!

**WALLY WOOD:** Is that a tape recorder, Flo? You know I'm afraid to talk into these machinesIcannevarthinkofanythingtosay!I'mnotabigtalkerIshutuplikeaclamIgetstruckdumbmymindgoesblankand. . .

**STAN:** Okay, okay, forget it! Boy! I'd hate to hear you when you feel like talking.

**FLO:** Stan, **Dick Ayers** is on the phone.

**STAN:** Let's surprise him.

*(Sound of receiver being picked up.)*

**STAN:** Hi, Dick. We have a recorder playing and you're talking to millions of people right now.

**DICK:** You some kind of nut or something? I just want to tell you I want a raise!

**STAN:** Dick, don't you understand? People are listening! You're talking to the whole world!

**DICK:** I always knew you'd crack some day, **Lee**! Just my luck, it had to happen when I ask ya for some more dough! Well, I'm going back to SGT. FURY. Goodbye!

**FLO:** Another phone call for you, Stan.

**Stan:** Oh, not any more! I'm getting an earache!

**FLO:** But it's **Don Heck**!

**STAN:** The idol of the IRON MAN fans? The ace of THE AVENGERS? *(Picks up the phone.)* Hi, Don! What's doing?

**DON HECK:** Stan, I was just wondering. Wasn't I supposed to draw IRON MAN last week?

**STAN:** Sure, why do you ask?

**DON:** So how come you mailed me a PATSY WALKER script?

**STAN:** Yipe! Did I do that? That's awful!

**DON:** Oh well, don't worry, I'll send it back to you.

**STAN:** That's not why I'm worried, I must have sent your script to **Al Hartley**! I can just imagine Iron Man looking like Patsy Walker this issue. Okay, talk to you later, Don.

*(Hangs up phone.)*

**STAN GOLDBERG:** Don't worry about it, Stan. Don't you remember that **Al Hartley** used to draw adventure strips? It may not be too bad.

**STAN:** Well, well, look who's here. **Stan G.**, our demon colorer. I've been meaning to talk to you, Stan. When are you going to remember it's the Hulk who has green skin, not Captain America!

**STAN G.:** Gee whiz, a guy can't remember everything. Anyway, I had to tell you what MMMS meant last week. And you're the guy who made it up!

**STAN:** But when I forget something, it's different.

**STAN G.:** Yeah, it's worse.

**SOL:** Stan, this is the most confused record I've ever heard!

**STAN:** Great, Sol! Just what we want. If it were anything else, it wouldn't be the nutty Marvel Bullpen!

**FLO:** Gosh, we don't have time for **George Bell** and **Vince Colletta** and **Larry Leiber** and **Bob Powell**.

**SOL:** That's great. Now if we ever form another club, we'll have something new to offer — voices that haven't been heard yet.

**STAN:** Nuff said, Sol. Now let's all get back to work in the bullpen. And as for you, marvelous merry marchers, welcome from all of us to all of you. If you want to know how glad we are to have you with us, just you listen. Okay, let 'em hear it, gang. . .

**ALL:** WAH-HOOO!

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**Please type or print your vote and information clearly.**

# LAST WORD

***Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001***

## EVERY ISSUE A SURPRISE!

Dave:

I love your magazine, just love it. When I heard that you were going to put out a magazine called COMICS INTERVIEW, I thought it would be the same old **Stan Lee-Jack Kirby-John Byrne**-whoever/whatever–is-popular-at-the-moment interview rag. But it hasn't been like that. Every magazine you put out has been a surprise. Memorable interviews have been **Alan Moore, Mark Evanier, Gardner Fox.** It's always a surprise to find out about something or someone I've been reading for years. So if you do interview **Kirby**, don't stop at CAPTAIN AMERICA, FANTASTIC FOUR, FOURTH WORLD or THE AVENGERS — what about BULLSEYE or BOYS' RANCH?

The writers of the Sixties and the artists of the Silver Age of DC are who I really want to see interviewed in your magazine. I am always interested in the strange, out-of-left-field interviews you seem to get — **Robert Culp, Kelly Nichols,** and **Mr. Rogers**, for god's sake.

I read the colorists' and the letterers' interviews. I would like to hear from one of those "little old ladies" who did mechanical separations long ago and far away, who gave comics that distinctive comic-book look.

I've been reading comics ever since I was too young to know what was in the word balloons. I grew up during the Silver Age, bought my RBCCs, bought **Steranko's** HISTORY OF COMICS when it came out, and got the BUYER'S GUIDE when it was free.

Your magazine keeps the history of comics alive and current with its oral histories and interviews. It is the one fanzine that I don't ever feel cheated buying.

On a personal note, before ending, I also work in the comic-book field in a small way. I work for a magazine distributor in Pittsburgh. We carry comics. As a total distributor, comics are a small concern, and you should see the wholesale destruction of comics. Tons and tons of comics thrown away, some only two weeks old. Titles like ALPH FLIGHT, X-MEN, and TEEN TITANS, covers torn off and dumped into postal carts.

Keep up the good work. And thanks for being there.

Bill Bead
905 Hamlet Court
Apt. 2
Monroeville, PA 15146

## PORNO STAR A FEATHER IN OUR CAP

Dear David & Co.,

Here's a copy of DOG BOY #5, hot off the press. Part of this issue parodies mainstream comics. This will be my first and last crack at such a satire, but it sure was fun to blow this story out.

As always, I find your mag most entertaining. I can't believe you interviewed a porno star! Since it will piss some people off, it's a feather in your cap. A bit of irate reaction is good for a publisher's soul.

Steve Lafler
1280-A Page Street
San Francisco, CA 94117

## NOT THE PRUDISH SORT, BUT...

Dear DAK,

I must say I'm flabbergasted to find you've decided a porno movie star is a suitable subject for interview in your magazine. Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not the prudish sort who thinks that whole scene is morally repellent; it's stimulating in small doses.

After reading the interview, though, I get the distinct impression that her primary value was in titillating your readership. She did not strike me as a serious fan of comics or anything else for that matter, excepting the world of exploitation and sex-and-violence movies

On top of all that, the lascivious **Miss**

**Kelly Nichols, our controversial Fan on the Screen in issue #13.**

Photo Steve Bryant

Nichols' face is leering at me from the cover of the October 1984 issue of HUSTLER. Truly, a picture does tell a thousand stories!

Gary Kimber
80 Searle Avenu
Downsview, Ontario
Canada M3H 4A5

## A VERY VALUABLE MAGAZINE

Dear David,

I find it surprising to notice that the issue of COMICS INTERVIEW I have before me is #13; it seem like it was only a few months ago that I was reading #1. (At that, #13 isn't the most recent issue — I have at least two more at home, but I have so little spare time that I am perpetually several months behind in my reading.) Anyway, time passes all too quickly and I am way overdue in sending my regards for publishing a very valuable magazine.

This note is specifically prompted by your request in issue #13, asking for feedback from readers. I can't give much substantial criticism because I have been generally quite pleased with the material in each issue. There is enough of a mix each time so that if I am personally inclined to dismiss the pertinence of one or two people interviewed, the rest of the issue makes up for it. As an example, the interviews in #13 struck me this way: **Gerry Conway** and, to a certain extent, **Roy Thomas**, are two people whose experiences interest me not at all. I have to recognize the influence of their past work and admit to the potential both men have for meaningful future work, but the personality flaws both show in these and other interviews have marred their writing to such an extent that I can generate only little interest in what they have to say. They have produced material of little substance, in my view, and I think I have had enough of their views as of perhaps ten years ago in other interviews. Were these two people the only ones featured in this issue, I can guarantee I would not have bought it even to complete my "collection" of your magazine.

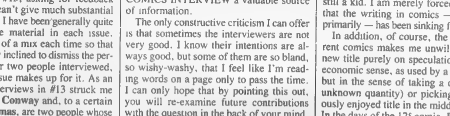
However — and this is my main point — the **Don Rosa** and **Ernie Colon** interview would have been, each alone, worth the price of the magazine. And thus, I illustrate my main point — the value of your magazine is in its variety. Retailers, publishers, publicity people — interviews with such individuals as well as interviews with artists and writers make **David Anthony Kraft**'s COMICS INTERVIEW a valuable source of information.

The only constructive criticism I can offer is that sometimes the interviewers are not very good. I know their intentions are always good, but some of them are so bland, so wishy-washy, that I feel like I'm reading words on a page only to pass the time. I can only hope that by pointing this out, you will re-examine future contributions with the question in the back of your mind. "Was anything really *said* in this interview?" You might still accept interviews that I will think are useless, but once the subject is brought up, you might also tighten up things a little bit, and future interviews may become more exciting as a result. All I ask is that you think about it.

As to general observation, I find it very difficult to read most Marvel/DC comics these days. I think that the occasional examples I pick up show a definite lack of inventiveness, taste, excitement and quality. The writing especially seems to be unappealing to a greater degree than ever before. I don't think this is due to my tastes becoming jaded after twenty-five years of comics reading, because I can become very enthusiastic over some titles (mostly the "alternative" books like MARS). Also, my interest in related media is undiminished from when I was a teenager and Hawkman was in BRAVE AND BOLD and SPIDER-MAN featured that character facing The Vulture. That is to say, in many respects I'm still a kid. I am merely forced to conclude that the writing in comics — Marvel/DC primarily — has been sinking for some time.

In addition, of course, the price of current comics makes me unwilling to buy a new title purely on speculation (not in the economic sense, as used by a "collector", but in the sense of taking a chance on an unknown quantity) or picking up a previously enjoyed title in the middle of a story. In the days of the 12¢ comic, I could afford

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S COMICS

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to try a half-dozen issues of BOMBA, THE JUNGLE BOY in hopes that the stories would improve. At 75¢ a crack, and with so many obviously more interesting books to choose from, I prefer to get books that haven't disappointed me, rather than buy HULK or FLASH.

It's unfortunate that there isn't a "reverse" COMICS INTERVIEW available to allow professionals the chance to get some unvarnished input from the public. I think if *they* knew how *we* here in the sticks viewed their work, they might benefit.

I know most pros can read COMICS FEATURE and other zines, and we can write to this or that person in care of the comics companies, but let's be honest: each of these options has its flaws. The standard zines will filter the letters sent to them, and they will appear — if accepted in the first place — only long after the opinions ceased to be pertinent. And sending letters to, say, Marvel, is a frustrating endeavor (as I found out as a letterhack from the 1964-1972 period).

There is a reason for mentioning the above, although I confess I went a little astray from the main point. I would like to encourage you to feature interviews from the following groups as much as possible:

1) Fanzine writers/editors/artists;
2) The newest participants in pro comics;
3) "Alternative" artists/writers;
4) Humor artists/writers (the people on the new DC/Marvel kid/humor books; some of the people in NATIONAL LAMPOON, some of the folks in HEAVY METAL, etc.
5) *More* interviews with people in marketing, production, etc.
6) And finally, how about an interview with someone who went through the Kubert School?

In conclusion, I like COMICS INTERVIEW quite a bit. I think you do a public service, as well as entertain, and I look forward to reading each issue.

Charles T. Smith
549 Whitall Street
St. Paul, MN 55101

### KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!

Dear DAK:

I just finished issue #13, and figured this was as good a time as any to write. I've been reading your magazine since #1 and, with few exceptions, have found the interviews interesting and enjoyable.

There's not much in the way of structure or format that I could suggest improvement upon, as I like the idea of interviewing people in different aspects of the industry each issue. I would like to see interviews with more production people, color separators, printers; the technical people who put these books together.

If you need any West Coast fans on the street, I'm available. Well, keep up the good work!

Rex Kiphut
853 N. Clementine St.
Anaheim, CA 92805

### COYOTE CORRECTION

Dear DAK:

Enjoyed your latest COMICS INTERVIEW, as usual, especially your interview with **Steve Englehart**, whom I consider one of the more intelligent and reasonable people in the business. I thought I'd pass along an art correction, though; only one of the COYOTE illustrations attributed to "**Truog** and **Howell**" were actually inked by me. I only inked issue #9 (from which the Coyote-God illo on page 39 was taken). I believe that the examples on pages 29 and 30 were embellished by the new regular COYOTE inker **Frank Springer.**

Richard Howell
Leonia, NJ

### COMICS INTERVIEW: PERFECT

Dear David,

In response to your "poll"...

I really can't imagine what you could do to improve COMICS INTERVIEW. It really seems perfect the way it is. If you're looking for innovations, well, who else would think of interviewing **Mister Rogers?**

And now that distribution to the stores has become much more dependable, it's one of the few publications I buy without reservation.

I do enjoy reading interviews with some of the old-timers who made worthwhile contributions to the art of comics, but have somehow been forgotten — or, if not forgotten, certainly neglected. **Graham Ingles**, for example, would be a real coup, and definitely an intriguing subject, supposing he was interested in talking about his days in comics.

Other than that, all I can say is keep up the good work.

Mark Burbey
P.O. Box 6167
San Francisco, CA 94101-6167

### TOO SOFT...?

Dear David,

I've enjoyed COMICS INTERVIEW so far, and I particularly enjoyed the interviews with **Steve Englehart** and **Alan Moore**, two of my favorite comics writers. But in spite of any pleasure I've derived from your magazine, I have a major problem with it.

These are all soft interviews.

Take, for example, your latest issue. It opens with a **Jim Shooter** interview by **Jim Salicrup**. Now **Salicrup** (correct me if I'm wrong) works for **Shooter.** So we have an interview heavy on historical detail (Jim, the taller wrote LEGION OF SUPER HEROES and THE AVENGERS, etc., etc.), tons of self-promotion ("I am fulfilling the destiny of the Marvel Universe" — does that mean we don't have to pay attention to Marvel Comics after this, since their destiny is all used up?), and precious little insight. I realize you're not in business for muckraking, and I'm just as happy about it, BUT...

I never got the feeling that **Salicrup** asked a single challenging question, NOR DID HE PAUSE TO CHALLENGE ANY OF

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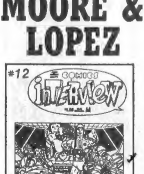


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## LETTERS

**SHOOTER'S** PRESUMPTIONS. I'm not saying that anything **Shooter** said was inaccurate or wrong-headed, but there were certainly aspects of **Shooter's** attitudes and thoughts that deserved greater scrutiny or illumination. Instead, we got an extended puff piece about why SECRET WARS is the greatest comic ever done. I would rather have gotten a picture of **Jim Shooter** as an intelligent, perceptive human being than a portrait of an ego that walks like a company man. This isn't possible when people like **Sallcrup** interview people like **Shooter**; they're just too damn close to each other. You should make sure your interviewers are more objective.

This is just an example. Can we really expect people who are friends of the interviewees to ask that question that puts the subject's back to the wall? (On the other hand, your own interview with **Groth** and **Thompson** occasionally broached touchy subjects.) The problem occurs time and time again in COMICS INTERVIEW (**Steve Ringgenberg** seems a particularly sycophantic and self-serving interviewer), and it diminishes the pleasure of an otherwise good magazine. Let's see a little less promotion (self and any other) and a little more insight in future issues.

George Ross
(no address given)

*George, I think your problem stems from a basic misunderstanding of the nature of this magazine. As stated in our subscription ad every issue, we feature "interviews with the pros, by the pros." You have, I believe, confused us with a news magazine — when we have made every effort to sidestep the "60 MINUTES" approach and bring you, instead, casual inside-the-industry interviews. As I put it in my editorial for issue #1: "As far as bias goes, you don't have to be on your guard — it's right out there, in an interview...people...want to know what the person who actually does something has to say about what he's doing."*

*In short, we endeavor to make our interviews less an "us-or-them" situation (which would be absurd, since we work in the comics field), but rather, take a "bull session" approach — as if sitting around and rapping after hours. Again, as I said in my editorial for COMICS INTERVIEW #1: "The idea is to provide a place where comics fans and professionals can get to know one another as people... Some of the other fanzines do a very good critical job...but in this case people will speak for themselves."*

*I hope that clears things up for you somewhat, George, so that you can relax and enjoy COMICS INTERVIEW for what it is, rather than being angry at what it isn't!*
*—DAK*

# BYRNE & DITKO

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NEXT ISSUE: We take a trip into the exciting universe of one of comics' youngest and most original new talents — writer/artist SCOTT McCLOUD! Catch a rising star and find out firsthand what's made *ZOT!* such a success with fans and critics alike. Also: A rap with Golden Age great ROD REED — writer of the ORIGINAL Captain Marvel! HEAVY METAL artist ARTHUR SUYDAM muses about music, movies & mudwogs! Marvel's CAROL KALISH — and more — all in COMICS INTERVIEW #18!

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